

SHWAY DINGA

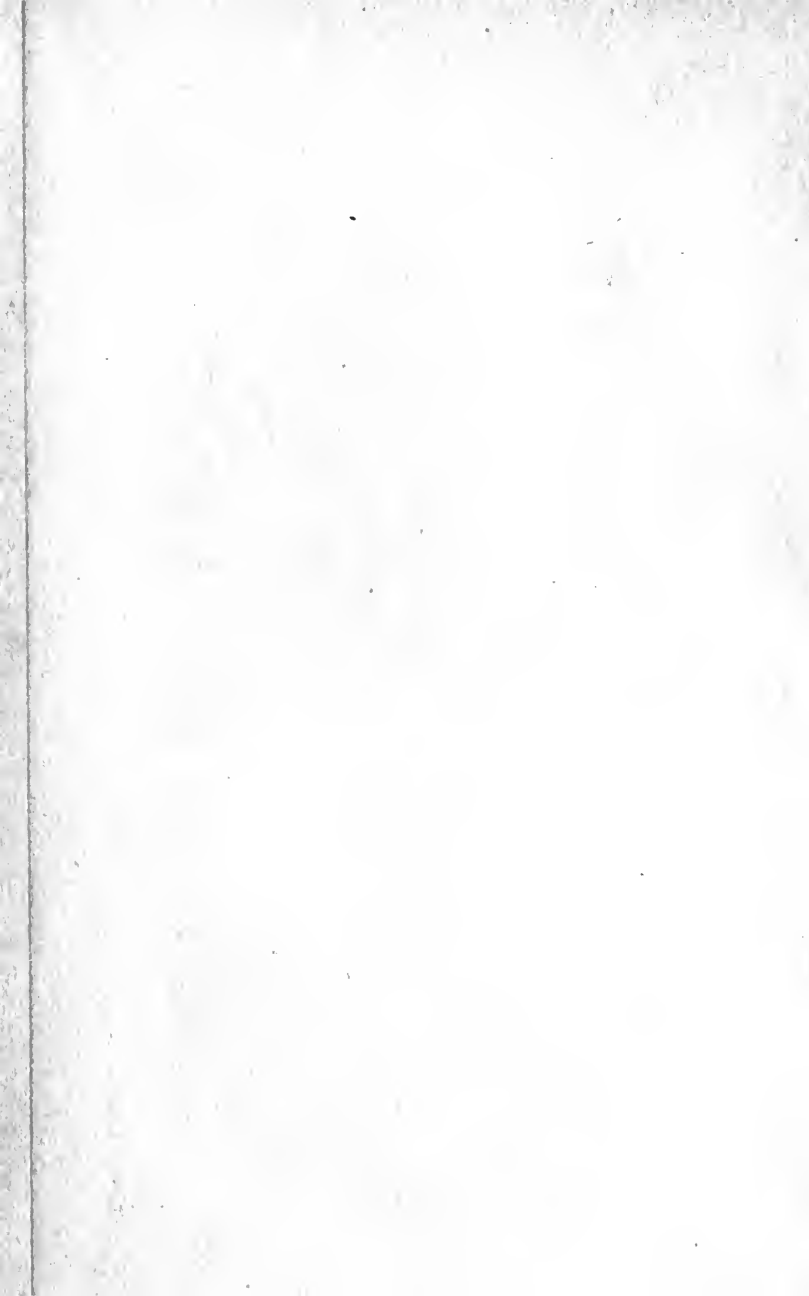
The
Repentance
of
Destiny

Barry Gain

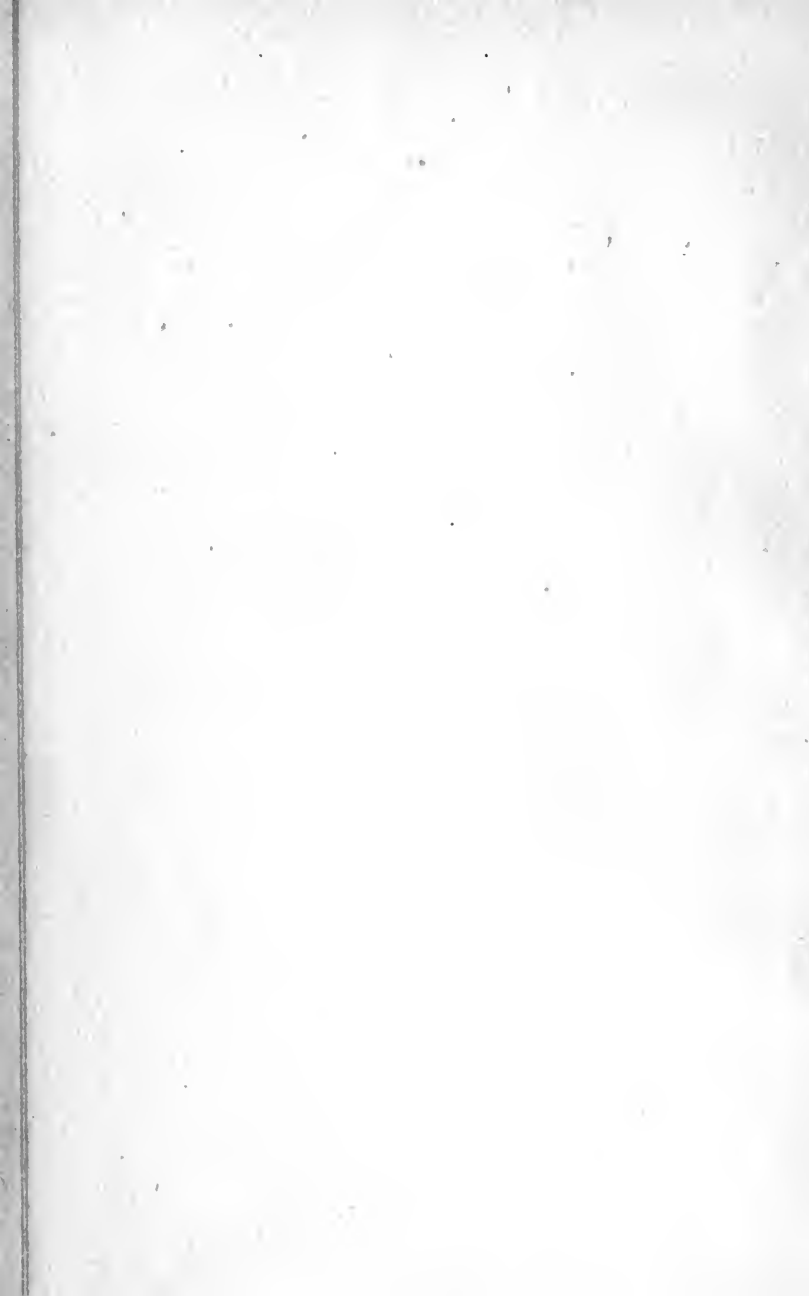
With the author's affectionate
regard.

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THE REPENTANCE OF DESTINY



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A ROMANCE OF ANGLO-BURMAN LIFE

BY

SHWAY DINGA

AUTHOR OF "WHOLLY WITHOUT MORALS"



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PART I

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THE REPENTANCE OF DESTINY

CHAPTER I

“A LONELY mind in a holy setting does not attract me,” said Tun Min with emphasis, “and I refuse to be a monk!”

He was addressing his father, Ko MOUNG, a blood-stained Burman, whose declining years were passed in the ancient and royal city of Pegu. It had once been famous as the capital of the Talaings for its substantial fortifications, its broad streets, and the sanctity of the great Shwe-hmaw-daw Pagoda; but it was shorn of much of its glory when devastated by the fire and sword of Alompra the Terrible. Ko MOUNG himself was not a Talaing, having been born and bred in Upper Burma of pure Burmese blood, but after the expulsion of Thebaw he retired to the comparative peace and quiet of a town that had enjoyed the benefits of good government for a third of a century. In his youth as well as in his prime he had regarded the law with contempt, and its infraction with delight; he had stolen his neighbour's wife, defrauded tax-collectors, waylaid and dacoited whole flotillas of paddy-boats that had exchanged their cargoes for coin, and had stuck at nothing, whether it was smuggling, stealing,

burning, or killing, provided it was the right stimulant his moral nature wanted at the moment. When, however, the cataclysm came which swept the descendants of Mindoon Min from off his throne, Ko MOUNG readily attached himself to Victoria's lieutenants, and helped them scour the country in search of dacoits who were then ravaging the newly annexed territory. But though the occupation had the right flavour its energetic character was rather beyond his weight of years, and at a convenient pause in the chase he withdrew to the repose of a city not fully awake from the deep slumbers of decadent years. He was religious in neither life nor thought, but he was deeply impressed with the necessity in old age of atoning for the pleasant memories of youth, and setting vigorously to work had come to be known and honoured as the builder of pagodas and kyoungs and zayats. Those were undoubted works of merit, but he had lived a busy life, and was afraid that there was still a shortage on the credit side of life's ledger. Such a thought was a source of grave anxiety, till he resolved to be done with it once and for all by making his only son a monk.

"My influence," he reflected, "will make him a Bishop, and what can be more meritorious? The past will be sponged wholly out."

But Ko MOUNG had reckoned without Tun Min, on whose shoulders the robes of monasticism had never sat lightly.

"The language of rebellion," said the father reprovingly, "suggests a disturbed mind and a purblind soul."

"Those are what I left with the Bishop in his

kyoung," said Tun Min, as he undutifully cast off his novitiate's robes.

"Well, well, boy, youth has its temperature, and we won't quarrel about a degree or two more or less. But what did you say when you broke the sad news to the Bishop?"

"I left no doubt about my renunciation. I told him I had a complaint which he had not, and that as different diseases had different remedies I should test the efficacy of another treatment."

"By that you meant change of air?"

"By that I meant the life of a man and a gentleman. I know what is in Ko MOUNG's mind. Yes, I like the ladies. But what I feel most is the spur of ambition."

"Of what?"

"I want to rise and shine. I want to be a myook, ruling and judging, punishing and rewarding."

Ko MOUNG laughed heartily but not mockingly.

A myook in those early days of empire was sometimes a judge of unlimited incapacity, but always of strictly limited jurisdiction. In Burmese times his commission had been both simple and comprehensive: endowed with a ward, they bade him "eat" it! There was then neither pay nor promotion, the myook being permitted to devour what was handy in exchange for his public services; and the office, being free from the embarrassment occasioned by audits and inspections, was regarded as both honourable and lucrative. But we changed all that. Change in our political philosophy connotes growth, enlightenment, and prosperity, so we rudely put the myook on pay. The Burman is a merry soul, and when the decree went forth that the myook

was to cease his exactions, he celebrated it in song, and with pwes and with wine. He thought it a capital joke, possibly as a bold effort to Christianize the race at one stroke, and he laughed all the louder ; but he was undeceived when he found that we not only put myooks on pay, but also put them in gaol ! Pay and punishment were, in short, our purifiers, and there emerged from the Imperial lazaretto a new and clean-looking public service, but emphatically more honourable than lucrative.

" I am serious," said Tun Min, " so don't laugh."

" Come, come, child !" said his father discouragingly. " Sane men do not desire the jewels in the tsainbaw of the Shwe Dagon. Myook, indeed ! Often enough have I thought of that noble order ; but it was far oftener that they thought of me. Trap after trap did they lay for me, but I was too wary."

" Bury the past, for its remembrance only impoverishes you, and your finances will not bear the strain of any more charities."

" My finances," said Ko Moun, who was very well off, " have broad shoulders, and have supported both myooks and charities. But has Ko Tun Min's ambition gone mad ? What hope is there that his dreams will be realized ?"

" Myooks," said Tun Min, holding up his forefinger, " are not born, but made."

" Like money ?"

" Exactly. In ways that are lawful or not, according to one's prejudices."

" Only some ways are shorter than others."

" That is what the Sayadaw said with sadness. He

thought there was no quicker route to a fat billet than by marrying one's sister to an official—that is, temporarily."

"You have no sister to sentence."

"The Sayadaw was not thinking of me, but was illustrating the ugly truth that straight roads are longer than circuitous ones."

"Geometry, my son, does not mix with morals—but what does is common sense. You are highly gifted—how have you chosen?"

"Well, the front door of competition is barred and bolted."

"I never heard of it."

"They don't often open it," said Tun Min, who had studied the question, "but when they do it is for brainy fellows without interest in high places."

"I never met a brainy myook in my life. Who's been stuffing you up?"

"Ask the Sayadaw. But they are regarded with suspicion, and are employed on menial jobs, such as counting stamps or whitewashing plague spots."

"You will never enter by that door. What of the others, my son?"

"The others are all behind—and they have this unique distinction that they are always open."

"And who are they that enter?"

"The well-introduced."

"Let's get to the bottom of statecraft," said Ko Moun, who was thoroughly interested. "You have now spoken of the thoughtfulness of our Government for the minority who have either brains or friends; but how about the multitude?—they have neither."

"They are not forgotten," said Tun Min, taking a pull at Ko Moung's leg. "For them were the professions invented—such as law, medicine, and journalism. Believe me, they are not only well filled but overstocked."

"Charlatans one and all," said Ko Moung, thinking of his hairbreadth escapes. "I have been in tight corners, my son—in the grip of the law or of death. But it was Ko Moung that saved himself."

"Besides, father, there's no honour in the practice of a profession. No one 'shikoes' to doctors and pleaders, but the myook is a prince in his township."

"There is no incense like worship, my son. It is the soul's intoxicant. It was the same with Mindoon's myooks as with Victoria's. They are all of one pattern. And has this notion of a pattern ever occurred to Ko Tun Min?"

"I don't follow."

"Well, I'll explain. Look at our rulers, and tell me if every class has not a distinct stamp of its own. For instance, when out on column I was thrown much with soldiers, and found them all alike—habitually tight, and immoral and abusive. And as for our commissioners, they were uniformly peevish and penurious, loving none and beloved of none. Then who is the policeman but an expert in polo and other pastimes that his pay will never cover? And have we forgotten the young wundauk mins?"

"What about them?"

"They were the nicest of the lot, with their curries and cocktails and concubines, and there was little to choose between them."

"I don't know what my pattern is," said Tun Min, unalarmed. "But they can try me as they did the secretary's butler—he made quite an orthodox myook."

"I knew that Madrassi 'boy' well," said Ko MOUNG, who had an excellent memory. "And it came to a severe crisis in the Burma administration when it was felt that either he or his master must go. In the end matters were compromised, and the 'boy' went—but it was to a myookship."

"Ma Lé!" exclaimed Tun Min as he saw the Sayadaw enter after leaving his sandals at the door.

The Sayadaw, or Bishop, U Dharna, had attained episcopal office without a struggle, for he was distinguished alike for his piety and his learning in a society that was prolific in neither. He had, moreover, been a diplomatist, and in the troublous days of Thebaw had conducted secret negotiations between the two Courts at Mandalay and Rangoon, which brought equal credit to his character and profit to his diocese. Asceticism was deeply set on both his face and figure, but it had never marred the sweetness of his expression or of the silvery tones of a voice that rang of purity and love; and he knew his powers, for they had seldom failed. Buddhist bishops are not less dignified than our own, and a visit to the house of Ko MOUNG would never have occurred to U Dharna, but he was engaged in reclaiming a recalcitrant pupil, and therefore did the end justify the means. He had brought back many a waif and stray, and when he set out to reclaim Tun Min he already pictured the pupil back in his kyoung, deep in his studies, and dead to the world and its distractions. He seated himself on a Donabyu

mat while his hosts knelt deferentially before him, expecting to be led in a devotional exercise—not prayer, but a service in which wholesome precepts are recited. But the Bishop proceeded to business at once.

“Now that my son,” he said with a smile, “has done his filial duty to a loving parent, doubtless he will be glad to return with me.”

“Never, my lord! It is our fashion to become monks—just as it is for Kalas to go to school—only for a time; and with me that time is past.”

“But where there are pupils there must be teachers. And what is there more meritorious than the care of the young?”

“The care of the old, the wrong-headed, the wicked,” said Tun Min promptly, for he had thought it all out, and was prepared to discuss the matter if challenged.

“That,” said the Bishop, “is none of your business. We surrendered it to our rulers at the Conquest; and no one could do it as well.”

“But, my lord, they do not do it unassisted.”

U Dharna had never suspected that deep down in Tun Min’s heart was a longing to shine in the judicial service, and for a moment he looked out on the river that flowed by the side of Ko MOUNG’s house, and was silent.

“It is not the charm of good-fellowship,” he reflected, “nor the fascination of fair women, nor yet the magnetism of athletics that attracts him, but it is ambition of another and more virulent type. It is the subtlest seduction of all—it is the glamour of Imperialism!”

The Bishop knew he had nothing to offer that would

tempt a mind made up to seek employment under Government ; but his experience had proved that plans hastily formed were hastily abandoned, and he thought it worth the trouble to investigate the genesis of Tun Min's ambition.

" When did my son make up his mind ?" he asked, drawing nearer to Tun Min.

" Long before I passed the patmabyan examination."

" Then your ambition was a plant that grew and matured in darkness ?"

" Altogether, my lord."

" That, at any rate, was appropriate," said the Bishop, " for it is in darkness and mystery that the people of this world are ruled and misruled. But beware of pitfalls ! In their busy lives officials must be doing—not thinking—they haven't the time for it, and there's the danger. You will be vested with powers for good and evil, and if you wish to draw your pay you will exercise them. You will draw your pay ? What then ? Will the mistakes of to-day bear no fruit to-morrow ? There will be no Naikban for Tun Min."

The association of cause and effect has deeply impressed the Buddhist mind, and it is accustomed to shudder at the eternal consequences that flow on and on from the most ephemeral and imponderable causes, and imperil the attainment of Naikban or Nirvana, which, being the absorption of the Ego in a general and all-pervading essence, is the goal of all true Buddhism. But Tun Min had come early within the zone of a Christian missionary's teaching and preaching, and had ceased to be enamoured of Buddhist metaphysics without being exactly divorced from them. This, however, he

could not admit, so he resolved to turn the Bishop's flank with his own weapons.

"It is not, my lord," he said with humility, "that evil alone begets consequences, but good is as virile a parent; and if you say that I've been a good pupil, then why not a good myook?"

"Bother you and your myooks," said Ko MOUNG impatiently. "I thought we had done with impossibilities."

"It may be impossible for a myook to be good, but it is not impossible for Ko Tun Min to be a myook," said the Bishop, intending to be severe.

"But," said Ko MOUNG, who was not disposed to abandon his doctrine of patterns lightly, "is that stripling of the right pattern, my lord? When I think of all the myooks I either evaded or killed, they were all cast in one contemptible mould."

"Are two faces, are two souls, ever alike?" asked the Bishop. "Who did Ko MOUNG resemble when he was pillaging and plundering? Who, again, did he recall when he gave wells to the thirsty, shelters to the homeless, and medicine to the sick? I see Ko MOUNG's mistake. He means not patterns, but ideals. There are no ideal judges."

"When I was a boy," said Ko MOUNG, "they talked of ideal princesses."

"Only in fable," said the Bishop, and, turning to Tun Min, asked if his choice were irrevocable.

"Quite, my lord," said Tun Min in a clear voice, showing that he had no desire to continue the discussion.

"You mean to join the Government?"

Tun Min nodded.

"Then," said the Bishop, "possibly I have without intending it assisted you very considerably on the way to the desired goal."

Both Ko MOUNG and his son looked open-mouthed at the Bishop, wishing that he would at once remove their suspense.

"Do you," asked the Bishop, "know the new civilian with the red face and straw-coloured hair?"

"Walworth Bubbles?"

"The same. He's a brainy boy, and you'll learn a lot from him."

"What, go to school again? Never!" said Tun Min, feeling that practical joking was not exactly within the episcopal province.

"As a teacher," said the Bishop, looking amused. "He has to pass in Burmese."

"He's begun quite well," said Ko MOUNG with a grunt. "He actually ordered his young lady before he arrived, and now that she's moved in he never moves out."

There was little foundation for the libel, but it had been true of all Walworth's predecessors, so Ko MOUNG assumed it was true of him.

"That," said the Bishop sadly, "is the prescribed course of study for the colloquial test; but there are higher standards for which scholarship is essential, and when they asked me to name a tutor I could think of none other than the gifted Tun Min."

MOUNG Tun Min wept silently.

"Let me see," said the Bishop, "the good missionary grounded you well in English before you joined us?"

Tun Min nodded, for he was still very choky.

“And with us you shone so in Pali scripts that the examiners were amazed. My son, whither this tutorship will lead to who can see or say? You have my benediction—may you follow the light. Purity and firmness of purpose have their own reward—prove that the myook can also be a missionary.”

The Bishop left as he had come, without greeting and without farewell.

“I’m glad the silly old man has gone,” said Ko Moun, assuming a more comfortable pose. “Who knows, Ko Tun Min, but this may be the chance of a lifetime! Take it with both hands. These young civilians have long memories, and show their gratitude, not by tossing you a ten-rupee note, but by speeding you on your official way.”

“But it will take time to qualify.”

“That is ‘ullayga.’ They reward services more handsomely than appropriately. You remember Loo Tyouk—the scullery-boy who kept the Yaybaing’s pots and pans sweet and clean? They made him a myook! Judging may be good for his circulation, but what about the litigants?”

“Their laws, however, are simple,” said Tun Min, taking a rosier view. “There are ten precepts, and the missionary thought they covered all possible human contingencies that might arise.”

“A code of only ten commandments,” said Ko Moun, surprised at Tun Min’s appalling ignorance, “would be contemptible. The Empire would be the laughing-stock of the nations. Don’t you know my sporting records?”

“I know you’ve done some killing.”

"The kala's prowess is measured by the number of the tigers he shoots."

"And by the elephants' tusks he mounts."

"Big or small," said Ko Moung, "game is game, and the sportsman counts success by the heads in his bag. So did I. There are no less than two hundred and ninety-eight sections of the penal code that I have broken as if they were biscuits. You won't believe me, but the public prosecutor said I was top scorer, and that the Government was positively sick."

"Sick?"

"Sick of having to make newer and more severe laws every day."

"It must be lovely making laws!" said Tun Min, leaning back against the wall, and trying to imagine the charms of legislation.

"Nothing to the exhilaration of smashing them to smithereens! But don't run off with the notion that myooks make laws. He had enough to do to administer them when Ko Moung and his friends were on the loose. Those were grand days! And to think of the absurdity of Ko Moung's son wishing to be a myook. We bribed them, killed them, spat on them, or evaded them as it suited our purpose, but such a notion as wielding magisterial power never entered our dull minds. Still, it is a worthy ambition."

"Did the Bishop," asked Tun Min, "say when I should call on the young Wundauk Min?"

"He was obsessed. The episcopal mind is easily shocked and reduced to pulp by the mildest disappointment."

"And yet Ko Moung looked forward with equal

repose and satisfaction to his son's promotion to the same office."

"It was its meritorious aspect," said Ko Moun, wishing to forget all about it, "that soothed—but never mind that. Walworth Bubbles when translated means 'good fortune'; and, believe me, if you wish to get on you must woo fortune both early and late."

"Will you come with me, father?"

"That would be fatal. Thakin will want to be private and confidential. He is honeymooning with a bride he cannot talk to, and you must be his mouth. Walk warily. If you're suspected of making fun you're ruined. Keep the fun for your dad."

Moung Tun Min did not like the prospect of going alone, and was angry with the Bishop for not suggesting a personal introduction; but he decided he would wait on his lordship, the Wundauk Min, only, Burman-like, he put the visit off till the morrow as though he were paying a debt.

CHAPTER II

TUN MIN looked out of his bedroom window on the murky waters of the Pegu River, and listened to the boatman's song of love and beauty and wealth. It was a song characteristic of a light-hearted, happy-go-lucky peasant, who had no thought of happiness unless it was connected with his paddy-boat and paddy-field, with his loving wife and gay rollicking children, and with the cattle he regarded as his own flesh and blood. But the song touched no chord in Tun Min's heart. His soul was stirred by other ambitions, and he yearned for another life. He turned from the busy river to the equally busy highway, and gazed for a moment on a melancholy group of monks returning with their morning's collections, and wondered whether he was cast in a different mould from his compatriots.

"The Burman," he mused, "is one or other of two types. My father represents one, and the Bishop the other. Ko MOUNG dedicated every possible moment of his life to pleasure, and there's not a fibre in his bulky body that wasn't trained to contribute to his animal delights. With the Bishop it was the other way. He abrogated natural law in the animal world—for himself—and pretends that he has found a comfortable asylum in a monkish mind. Bah! Ko MOUNG's life was depraved—the Bishop's is useless and purposeless."

While he mused he heard an unfamiliar voice chanting an equally unfamiliar maxim.

"Those," said the voice, "who sit in the shadow of the Great shall bask in the sunshine of Goldmohurs."

It was Bindasery, the messenger who had been commanded overnight in imperious tones to "fetch" Tun Min to the bungalow of the impatient Walworth Bubbles. "Take this and begone!" said Tun Min, mistaking him for a beggar, and flinging him a four-anna bit.

"It is blessed to give," said Bindasery, salaaming, "but I'm no mendicant. I'm the humble slave of the new Wundauk. You're a lucky fellow to have found favour with him."

"Does he want me?"

"By telegram! If you dawdle it'll be death! These young civilians have neither manners nor patience."

"They have their ways and we ours—we must be tolerant. But just a minute—while you call a gharry I'll put on my very best putsoe, and, believe me, Thakin will be amazed at our expedition."

Tun Min's blood was aglow, and his heart literally thumped to hear the good news that he was summoned to the presence of his creator.

"I shall now," he said to himself, "be created anew in estate, if not in body and mind, and the glory will be Walworth Bubbles's. If he has sense, gratitude, and influence, we shall rise and shine together. Of course, I cannot aspire to the dizzy heights of a commissioner-ship. In the Imperial economy the guardian is always greater than his ward. He is my trustee—

some day he will be my governor—may I then be his Woon."

The ticca was at the door almost before Tun Min had completed his simple toilet, and he was soon started on the first momentous journey of his life. It was a long drive, and he thought he would encourage the garrulous messenger to discuss his master in the hope of discovering whether the Wundauk had any moral and spiritual corns that were better avoided. The missionary had shown marked symptoms of several, and Tun Min thought it likely that Bubbles might possibly have a few that were peculiar to him.

"Is this Wundauk different from other men?" he asked, shutting the door of the carriage with some violence in the hope that it would jam and stay in its place.

"He has a man's appetites, and a master's manners," said Bindasery, looking the picture of disgust.

"That," said Tun Min with approval, "is natural to all in masculine authority. But what of his temperature? Does it rise and fall like a tidal river?"

"It never falls; and I have watched it with alarm! He began by abusing my mother, but that is only customary. Then he took to fining and beating me! Now he suggests sending me to penal servitude for life, twice a day!"

"His cook is to blame," said Tun Min, as if he had had the complaint all his life. "You know the Sayadaw? According to him temper is much more a matter of digestion than of morals."

"Neither his digestion nor his morals bother him much, as you'll soon see. Yesterday the policeman

asked him how he liked the country, and what do you think he said ?”

“ Doubtless something polite, though possibly untrue—that, the Sayadaw said, was characteristic of English manners.”

“ No, no ! He told the brutal truth with a snigger. He said where there were curries and concubines there was his paradise.”

“ That is not an uncomfortable temperature, and he might be a capital fellow for all that.”

“ Why do you ask ?” said Bindasery, wondering whether he had given not only his master but himself away.

“ I’m interested. I’m going to be his munshi—that is, to begin with, but if I’m lucky——”

“ Yes. He can work miracles with your destiny. But you must be necessary to him. I tried that game myself, but only succeeded in becoming a peg for his blasphemy.”

“ If you were guilty of an error of judgment you can surely correct it,” said Tun Min. “ You are both young ; and time passes slowly.”

“ Matters will never improve. As I said, I’m not necessary to him. Whether he plays or whether he works—and he’s prodigious at both—he can do without Bindasery.”

“ So play and work consume all his energies ?”

“ All. As a matter of fact, it is all play, only work is its serious side. But he exhibits the same tastes and the same temper whatever he is doing. In office he imposes taxes, raises rents, fines and imprisons—out of office he is shooting and killing !”

"I don't know that I shall take to him," said Tun Min, feeling nervous about the approaching interview.

"Give him a chance. But if he begins dropping you out of a top window then you'd better limp home, and resume the yellow robe of a monk."

"I'd rather die than that!"

"Disappointment doesn't agree with you Burmans," said the messenger with a smile. "I've met many who took to dacoity to be even with destiny, and, my word, they had a merry time till they were caught! But let's have a look at your hands. It was my skill as a palmist that got me my present job, and, believe me, if you are hanged I can foretell the day and hour to a nicety."

The Burman brackets palmists and astrologers with the barest necessities of life, and shows the esteem in which they are held by addressing them as Sayas—as professors in some branch of science. Tun Min had had his fortune told on the pagoda platform dozens of times, and as the forecast was invariably favourable his belief in the art was deep-rooted, and he held both hands out, almost thrusting them into Bindasery's face.

"Empty hands," said Bindasery with the craftiness of the trade, "betoken a still more empty future"; and taking the hint, Tun Min immediately made a donation that was large enough to gild the thread of destiny.

"You are a Burman," said Bindasery, squeezing the soft hands he held, "and your destiny is naturally that of a Burman."

"If that's all you know——"

"Be patient—you are not yet a Wundauk."

"But shall I ever be one?"

"If you can kill a woman who threatens to destroy you—without destroying yourself."

"Women do not mingle with my thoughts—you are romancing."

"You can choose whether she makes your bed—but, mark me, she can dig your grave whether you like it or not."

"But there are no new marks, my friend—how do you tell me that?"

"The lines are as old and as unchangeable as your destiny. I'm not lying. What inspires you with other hopes?"

"The 'htee,' of course. Doesn't that betoken a royal crown and sceptre—ambition satisfied and happiness achieved?"

"Be not deceived, my young friend—the 'htee' you see is a hangman's noose!"

Tun Min withdrew his hands hastily, and, pale as death, scanned them closely, expecting to see symptoms of a cruel tragedy fully developed, but instead he saw just the same old scrawks that pagoda palmists had interpreted to mean a career heavy with years and loaded with honours.

"No wonder," he exclaimed with wrath, "the Wundauk prescribes untold tortures for a liar like you! Did you tell his fortune with a mouthful of lies?"

"If I have exaggerated the bitterness in your cup of life by a single drop, then may the lightning reduce me and mine to cinders!"

"Come, then, and tell me where the signs are, or I

shall sew you up in the hide of an ass, and drown you with my own hands——”

“Let me convince you—do you know your line of fate when you see it?”

“I have two such lines; and do you deny their eloquence?”

“I confirm it. Tell me where those lines end, and don’t scorch me with your looks.”

“One ends on the head line, and the other on the heart—but that’s a long way off.”

“Don’t be comforted with shadows. Be assured that both your heart and mind will betray you. Are your lines of life not snapped before you have begun to be a man? Is your line of head not broken in the middle? and how gleams the star on Saturn? Then, can you count the crosses on——”

“Never mind the crosses—I’m not a Christian, and to me they mean nothing. But is there not a wealthy marriage?”

“Mercury and Venus do meet in life’s thoroughfare—by accident—but not in Tun Min’s hand.”

“Then what have I to hope for?”

“A short life of more distraction than distinction—for a time you will rise and shine—then you will fall and wane—and the end will be rapid.”

While Bindasery spoke and prophesied, Tun Min trembled, and a cold perspiration broke out all over him. He remembered hearing the missionary say that the art of prophesying had been brought to great perfection by the ancients, and he recalled the names and characters of Biblical seers with a feeling that he was doomed.

"Have you seen another hand like mine, and has your forecast come true?" asked Tun Min, hoping to discover some foundation for doubt.

"Only one such, but the sun has not had time to rise and set often enough for his thread to snap."

"It's a man, then?"

"Curiously enough it is Walworth Bubbles, and it is in good company that you will either be made or marred."

Tun Min was now thoroughly alarmed, and wished he had never left the sanctuary of the monastery, with its simple life and promise of annihilation after a life of concentrated thinking and self-denial; but he could now see both the Wundauk's house, and the Wundauk himself looking at the approaching ticca, and no retreat was possible. Anyhow, he thought he had been warned enough, and to be forewarned might, he hoped in his case, mean that he was forearmed, and taking his courage in both hands, he left the ticca at the gate of destiny, and, making a deep obeisance, entered the study of the terrible Walworth Bubbles.

CHAPTER III

THE partiality of scholarship for plebeian surroundings is notorious, and Walworth Bubbles was therefore respecting its traditions when he agreed to be born in a grocery on the Walworth Road. There, however, his reverence for tradition ceased, and, scorning the attractions of successful trade, applied his vigorous mind to the acquisition of a sound knowledge of languages both living and dead. Those were, indeed, the golden days of Abbot, and becoming a "citizen" the child Walworth grew in classic lore till he passed by natural and easy transition to a junior studentship at the House, taking *en route* the Indian Civil, the Hertford, the Craven, and the Ireland. In strictness his Oxford career should have determined at the close of his second year, but the India Council then as now was captivated by the ripeness and culture of Oxford scholarship, and Walworth was allowed the indulgence of an extended probation. His Dean had hoped that the association would be permanent, and that a professorial fellowship would be the goal of the young scholar's ambition, but the atmosphere of Common room was closer than Walworth liked, with its professed and unprofessed beliefs and unbeliefs, and he openly expressed an ungrudging preference for the pure air of Imperialism.

The consolations of the cloisters seemed to him to shrink to nothing when compared with the power and dignity of an Imperial office, and if current reports were true the larger latitude in Eastern morals was an even greater attraction.

“To rise and shine by day,” he reflected, “one must go to bed with comfort by night.”

Having discovered the secret of business success and domestic happiness he boldly elected for service in a new province that had widely extended its boundaries in order to bring the blessings of Western culture to the doors of the barbaric East. It was in this way that it came about that Walworth Bubbles was settled in the Talaing capital, whither he was sent for training in the twin departments of law and administration, and was bidden to begin by acquiring a working knowledge of Burmese. To the uninitiated lingual study is associated with bespectacled professors, ponderous dictionaries, and much tedious wandering in the mazes of grammatical construction, but to the orthodox student proficiency in Burmese is simplicity itself. Concubinage, if referred to the standards of Western ethics, is a deplorable heresy, but judged by the laxer code of the Orient is of high utilitarian value; and Walworth's practical mind was at once attuned to its many excellencies. It was a popular belief that he had ordered his mistress by cable, but there was no foundation for the fable. On the contrary, his impatience to be equipped with an interpreter was explained by his impatience to be furnished in a suite he had set apart for his harem.

“My interpreter,” he argued, “will know both the

garden and the flowers that grow in it—but I shall cull them alone and unassisted.”

It was thus that the opportunity came to Tun Min to rise and shine, but he did not spurn it, for he had the practical mind of a navigator who is concerned with the tides of a river rather than with the purity of its waters.

“ You were a monk ; what made you chuck ?” said Walworth, addressing Tun Min, now kneeling on a mat before him.

“ I wanted to return to manhood.”

“ By Jove, you Burmans do begin early ! Fancy coming back to manhood at eighteen, when at my ripe age I’ve never got there yet—not permanently, anyhow, as I’ve only had the loan of another fellow’s missus, but he’s due back from furlough. Well—but just a minute—what about your pay ?”

“ It is enough honour to sit in my lord’s presence——”

“ That won’t be a damned bit of use to you, or to me either ! Listen. I expect you have some ambition—eh ?”

“ To rise and shine—that is, to find favour with my lord.”

“ This is odd. I left the chilly cloisters of a rapidly decaying church in order to have a damned good time—imperially in its widest sense—with bed and board amply furnished—yes, and to be a dazzling star in the political firmament. And, by God ! you, forsooth, forsook those filthy dirty abominations they call kyoungs for the same noble purposes. Well, let’s rise and shine together !”

Tun Min bowed low.

"You can begin at once. You shall be my bench clerk. That, I understand, is an unfailing recipe for making a judge."

"But I know no law except what the immortal master has bequeathed to us in the dammathats."

"You will never know any law, and you will be none the worse for it. Don't let it bother you. It's a contemptible subject. Almost more so than the misguided people who come and shout for it in the godown they call a court. Let's talk of something more soothing. Tell me, Tun Min, do you know all the girls in the district?"

"Not to speak to; I've only just doffed my robes. But there's nothing simpler than an introduction."

"How so?"

"It is understood that my lord is unmarried, and the girls are at present looking their very best with both eyes on the road that your lordship goes up and down upon."

"Good God! They're not expecting marriage?"

"Not of course in your sense, but in ours; and the association is regarded as perfectly honourable."

"That's a comfort. For the law allows only one wife—was there anything more absurd? Did one curry satisfy your simple tastes? Besides, curries and concubines, you know, sound much better than curry and wife—there's a suburban tone of penury and vulgarity about the latter."

Being well-bred, Tun Min repressed a smile, of which Walworth caught only the barest suspicion.

"But Tun Min," said Walworth, continuing, "there is one thing in my limited experience that I do really

bar, and it is to wake up with the smell of cocoa-nut oil in my nostrils every morning. Surely your religion——”

“Its use, my lord, is prescribed, not by the religion of the soul, but by the worship of the body.”

“You learnt that as a monk. Drop it. Let’s come to the point—I’m always wandering from it; but do you know Ba Shin’s daughter Minkalé?”

Tun Min gasped, and turned a deadly hue, but Walworth was engaged in relighting his cigar, and failed to notice his interpreter’s changed expression. It was a well-kept secret, but it was true that Tun Min was deeply attached to Minkalé, and his passion was held to explain much more forcibly his “return to manhood” than his professed appetite for an Imperial office. In his monastic solitude he had thought of her by day and dreamt of her by night as his wife, and here to his consternation was a thinly veiled suggestion that he should surrender her with all his future happiness to the soulless animalism of his Imperial master! He was staggered for a moment, but then he realized with all an Oriental’s instinct that the situation was one to be intelligently exploited without surrendering anything of any value, and he remembered that he had come, not exactly fully equipped, but highly trained in the Sayadaw’s school of diplomacy.

“I have known her all my life,” said Tun Min, boldly proclaiming his ability to introduce the Wundauk Min to the only girl he thought he ever did or could love.

“Lucky dog! My God, isn’t she just_adorable!”

Judged by Burmese criteria of beauty, Minkalé was

singularly beautiful, for, with the exception of her hair, which was jet black, she was a tall handsome study in the lightest of browns, her soft skin harmonizing exactly with her large but eloquent brown eyes. Like the women of her race, she dressed in exquisite taste, and her national costume, if it adorned, also gave the fullest expression to a graceful figure, the delicate outlines of which were seen to greater advantage in repose than in motion, for Burmese girls have never learnt to walk.

"But who," said Walworth, resuming in a tone of irritation, "is Moung Ba Shin, and what does he mean by having a beautiful daughter?"

"He is a Kyoungtaga——"

"You mean that he has left the long for the short road to heaven, and is cultivating a little cheap but 'meritorious' philanthropy? I don't care a damn about that! Is he a saheb, and is his wife a lady?"

"He began life as a paddy-broker, and built up an enormous fortune by his energies——"

"And infernal rascality, you bet! I'm interested; go on."

"Now he is a municipal commissioner, and wears both a chain and a medal of eighteen-carat gold."

"That's a bit of all right. He's self-made like ourselves, and won't despise us. But has he any privileges—rajahs, you know, are exempt from service on juries, payment of debts, and so forth."

"He is exempt from personal abuse."

"The Deputy-Commissioner can call him what he likes—surely."

"No one may call him the son of a lady dog, and it is an exemption he greatly values. He can gamble

without being invaded ; he can store contraband, such as opium, without being searched ; he can sip whisky-and-soda at the Chief Commissioner's garden-parties——”

“ He's not such a damned fool as to do that ! ”

“ And when he is sworn as a witness, judges and barristers don't shout at him and call him a liar.”

“ I see,” said Walworth disapprovingly ; “ our Imperialism has spoilt him, and practically made an Englishman of him—that is, so far as it can. With his swelled head he'll be looking for a husband for Minkalé. What a goose when I only want her as a loan ! ”

“ Oh no, my lord ! There is nothing in the Imperial arsenal, from patent leather to a knighthood, that would make an Englishman of a Burman.”

“ I've heard of your pride of race, but where the devil it comes from and what excuse there is for it only God knows ! We've had enough of Ba Shin and his exalted position—I'll bet he climbs down—but Minkalé, I'm sure, is a real darling ! And I'm sure she means business—she's always on the lookout when I pass. Do you think she'd care to come and spend the day just to give the introduction a cheery, friendly tone ? You know, Tun Min, with your gentle manner and persuasive power you could do the trick. But perhaps just at first it would be asking too much.”

“ It is never bad form in the East to ask too much—in fact, it is the only way to get anything. But, my lord, Minkalé is not a character easily conquered.”

“ She isn't a little vixen ? Now come ! ”

“ She has ideas—she has character, my lord.”

"Don't tell me she's a saint before she's had time to be a sinner. Up at Oxford nothing bothered me more than to see youth with a fixed determination to be godly without having sampled the joys of a godless life. Is it the same with Buddhists? And do your women believe in religion?"

"It is part of a woman's nature," said Tun Min, "and it is the meritorious life that has caught Minkalé's fancy."

"In what way?"

"She threatens to become a nun!"

While the garrulous Walworth had been babbling about Oxford and its saints and sinners, Tun Min's active brain had been at work groping in the dark for some dilatory suggestion which would, if followed up, have the effect of restraining Walworth's impetuosity, at any rate for a time, while greater minds than his were able to design a counter-attack. At first he thought his brain had gone to sleep for ever, when the brilliant idea struck him that they could play for quite a long time with the notion that Minkalé intended to take the veil.

"And," he reflected, "if Thakin can only be got to believe that it is my monkish influence that has got hold of her, he will try to get me out of the way. And to do that he will have to send me pretty far—that means a myookship at least—to begin with, anyhow."

Tun Min was certain that Minkalé would be willing to act the part, but that if the news were sprung on Walworth while he was courting her he might think it was a ruse, and if he did, it meant his own extinction. He therefore decided to prepare Walworth for a

possible, but by no means probable, disappointment as the surest way of grinding his own axe.

"So the nun," said Walworth, "is a living reality—is she?"

"That is so, my lord."

"That," said Walworth, looking puzzled, "is one of the paradoxes of life. When you are in full possession of all your faculties—with an unlimited capacity for sensual enjoyment—that above all is the time curiously enough when fanatical youth wishes to abjure the world. What damned rot! But don't tell me that the fair Minkalé has renounced the flesh and the devil irrevocably."

"Gautama thoroughly understood the Burman heart," said Tun Min, "and therefore the Buddhist vow is freely revocable. We can be saints and sinners alternately as often as we please, and there is a tonic in the change for both young and old. Perhaps my lord's blandishments will correct Minkalé's impressions of life. She has met no Englishmen yet save the Yaybaing Min."

The correction he hoped would never be accomplished, but that before Walworth was undeceived he himself might rise to quite a respectable height.

"That reminds me," said Walworth, thinking of his school and college days, "that whether I was competing for a blue blazer on the river or for a blue riband in the schools, my efforts were always crowned with success. But still that was a world from which women were excluded. Are women very different from men—in Burma?"

"They are more easily imposed upon."

"Well, Mounng Tun Min, it's useless talking—we must be doing. Another week of this cold companionless life would be death and damnation to the warm heart that beats in my manly bosom. What do you propose?"

"My lord, nothing. I mean that my imagination is much too dull to suggest a feasible plan, but my father has had a picturesque past in which the brightest colours were gay women. Let me consult him."

"He won't be shocked?"

"I've seen him in many moods, and his temperature bobs up and down, but he's never shocked. He takes an indulgent view of a man's necessities."

"Egad! There's nothing wrong with his circulation nor with mine. Well, see me again to-morrow, and, hark you, there's no such word as impossible in the language you and I speak."

Walworth was one of those characters who almost as soon as they have taken a serious step are assailed by doubts as to its propriety, and the moment Tun Min's back was turned he threw himself into a long-armed chair, and wondered whether he had not compromised the glorious traditions of his service. The fact that he might be the ruin of Minkalé also occurred to him, but looking about him he saw it was customary for a young Englishman to borrow an equally young Burmese woman without being held to have ruined her or to have compromised his service, and for the time his conscience was lulled.

"On the whole," he reflected, "it is the custom, and a damned good custom!"

Had he just then looked down his drive he would

have discovered another custom, for Bindasery, guessing from the length of the interview and its friendly tone that cordial relations had been established, swiftly pursued Tun Min to the gate, and there received an unwilling acknowledgment of a happy introduction.

“It is the custom,” said Tun Min, tossing him a rupee, “and a thoroughly detestable one.”

CHAPTER IV

TUN MIN's early summons to the presence of the golden-haired Wundauk Min was soon both public property, and the sensation of the quarter in which he lived, and Ko MOUNG's many friends promptly came round to congratulate the family on its good fortune. Among the first callers was, of course, MOUNG BA SHIN, who had all along known of Tun Min's passion for Minkalé, and who had openly rejoiced when he was told how one of Ko MOUNG's plans for earning merit had suddenly collapsed. He had, indeed, remonstrated with Ko MOUNG for callously committing his son body and soul to the monastic deep, but Ko MOUNG had a masterful will, and suggestions from outside, though pregnant with wisdom, made no impression upon him if they ran counter to his plans. All that, however, was now passed, and Ko MOUNG greeted his visitor with the warmth of an old friendship.

"But where will it lead to?" said Ko MOUNG, seizing the betel-box and motioning his guest to a seat on the gaudy Axminster that also did duty for a bed when conversation flagged.

"His is a great destiny," said Ba Shin, who took quite an affectionate interest in Tun Min. "Why be anxious? To look ahead is prudent, but to look far

ahead is to miss the good things that are near. He will soon be a myook, and is that not enough?"

"I," said Ko Moun, with a merry laugh, "used to love the aroma of a myook, but never in my own house. Burmese tastes, though, are like children's clothes—we grow out of them. I once chevied a myook who had robbed a diamond merchant from the wind-tossed waters of Meiktila to the city walls of royal Mandalay. There I caught and slew him, and now I have a presentiment that I shall be the father of one."

"Nobody will want to chevy Ko Tun Min," said Ba Shin, rolling his chew about with his tongue; "his administration will be a boon and a blessing."

"To himself certainly," said Ko Moun, with a wink, "but as you say, Ko Ba Shin, he is a good boy, and is shaping well. How is it with Minkalé? and was she interested in the news?"

"She was speechless, but I watched her do her hair again, and when she came downstairs it was in a new thamein, and a lovely white silk jacket—she'd got them all on including her diamond comb and earrings."

"Her prophetic eye foresaw a visit."

"Exactly; and her womanly heart thumped to know it was near. Indeed, she's been in a flutter ever since Shway Goung (golden-head) appeared; it was some silly superstition. Some lying saya on the pagoda platform warned her that her destinies would immediately alter on the appearance of a Wundauk Min with golden hair, and now that he's come she daily expects the fulfilment of the other half of the prophecy."

"The feminine mind is more heart than brain—what they wish they think will happen, and it's good that it

should be so for Ko Ba Shin, it keeps them quiet. But all the same, what you've just said fills me with misgiving."

"Why?"

"As a boy I showed my deep reverence for the truth by slipping such sayas as pretended to read my future, either from a dirty horoscope or from a sanguinary hand, but Minkalé seems to have happened on one who knew what he was raving about."

"But why should that distress you?"

"I foresee trouble. That young Wundauk with the golden head has an amorous heart, and his blood is aflame. He will explode as it stokes up unless somebody puts him in ice. What do you think? He has ordered the police to take an inventory of all marriageable girls in our quarter, and to note whether they are disengaged."

Both men burst out laughing, for in the Burmese moral code delinquency that is essentially masculine is easily condoned. Doubtless it is so also in the West—that is to say, in practice—but there it is deemed respectable to have ethical standards that you bow to on Sundays, but systematically cut during the rest of the week.

"Minkalé," said Ko Ba Shin, when he could talk without gurgling or spluttering, "is perfectly safe. She has been unwaveringly loyal to Ko Tun Min, though she might have made a dozen brilliant marriages while he was fasting and praying, and trying to convince his soul that he had abandoned his human heart for ever."

"Don't you believe it?"

“Don’t believe what?”

“That Ko Tun Min made any such spiritual effort. But we are straying from the point. Never be surprised. Supposing the Wundauk Min sends his greetings and a hint or two that he intends to examine the sanitation of your house——”

“Minkalé could pay a hasty visit to her cousins in Rangoon.”

“Then, my friend, you’d pay an equally hasty but much more uncomfortable visit to the town lock-up, where they’d search you for opium—and find it.”

“Impossible! Give the Englishman his due—he does not oppress us in these matters, but I admit that it’s not nice to have him for an enemy. But I’m not afraid. At the first sign of danger we can get the young people married, and the annoyance would cease.”

“You would have a worse annoyance in its place.”

“How so?”

“Ko Tun Min would cease to rise, and therefore cease to shine.”

“Perish my crops and my cattle rather than that! But if we put our heads together we can play with the Wundauk till he’s transferred; he’s no danger.”

“Two Burma heads may be better than one, but the good missionary says they were made for forgetting. He was talking of the golden-headed Wundauk Min, and forgetting the missionary’s holy character, I thought for a moment he was lying like a pleader. He was talking of Durbar day at Oxford, when they wear their gaudiest robes, and assemble to do honour to their best; and, my word! here we think a lot of a

man who is decorated with one chain or with one medal, but Ko Walworth on four different Durbar days carried off certificates of honour, silver dahs, gold watches and medals, and purses filled with sovereigns."

"He must have been brave in the capture of dacoits."

"He never saw one till he visited the lock-up. These were rewards for learning, so if you are pitting your craftiness against his, give your Burma head a brush with some of that polish that makes dull leather shine."

"Levity at Ko MOUNG's age and in this crisis does not become him. Let us be serious. The Wundauk will never finish his training here, and his is a fickle nature. When transferred, he'll forget Minkalé all right."

"But he mustn't be allowed to forget Minkalé if Tun Min's to get on. I don't wish to distress you, but he's got Minkalé on his list to be ruined and abandoned."

"That's a fable," said Ba Shin, who would not have minded the seduction, but the abandonment was distasteful.

"Well, here comes Ko Tun Min. Look at his face. Let him talk; perhaps he can reassure us."

But for being a shade paler, Tun Min's face was, as usual, expressionless, and he calmly removed his shoes, taking a seat on the carpet alongside Ko Ba Shin, of whom he was very fond, and from whom he had received every encouragement in private to forsake monasticism for the Government service, with its potentialities in the case of deserving servants.

"Judged by the length of the interview, Ko Tun Min must have made and left a favourable impression," said Ko MOUNG, inviting the boy to relieve their suspense.

"He has made me Bench Clerk and Interpreter at one stroke."

"Bravo!" said both the elderly men, immensely pleased.

"He was most affable. He didn't try to freeze me, as the Commissioner does when he rides round to patronize the Bishop in his kyoung. He said we could rise and shine together."

"He doesn't swell with his own importance?"

"He's a lady's man first and foremost, with all his feelings on the surface. There's importance about him, too, but it has nothing to do with his work."

"Play is much the more important of the two, and the Wundauk has sense," said Ko MOUNG; but all the same he had a foreboding that as his son's narrative developed, his own fears connected with Minkalé would be realized.

"Unless it's 'chinlon,' you'll be of little use to him as a playmate," said MOUNG BA SHIN, beginning to think that Walworth's estimate of Tun Min's worth might suddenly change for the worse.

"I'm not the right sex for his games," said Tun Min, with a smile; "but I can give him plenty of play for all that. To cut a long story short, he feels his isolation, and wants a lady companion."

"Not a wife?"

"No. And he has spied into our houses with some success."

"The police have abetted him," said Ko MOUNG, "and he has the photos of all our lady friends."

"He didn't want the police to tell him that Minkalé was the only pretty girl in Pegu."

"I told Ko Ba Shin so," said Ko MOUNG, now greatly agitated. "That Wundauk is the son of a dog, and unless we are very careful he will be our ruin."

"Did you tell him," asked Ko Ba Shin, "that Minkalé was betrothed to you?"

"It struck me," said Tun Min, not a bit ashamed, "that the truth was not suited to such a crisis. It's a funny thing about truth that it can both light and extinguish the lamp of hope, and I preferred a little harmless lying instead."

"It gives one time," said Ko MOUNG, rolling himself a chew.

"I invented what might turn out to be a nice little fable," continued Tun Min, "and, as it was chiefly to save Minkalé, it is not without merit."

"There is undoubted merit in tricking a rascal," said Ko MOUNG, hoping that whatever the artifice was it was enough.

"I suggested the futility of his thinking of her, as, notwithstanding her father and mother's solicitations, she was proposing to take the veil."

"Youk Kya!" shouted Ko Ba Shin, "we are proud of Ko Tun Min." And he began to sway his body from side to side, as they do in a pwe.

"In time," added Tun Min, "the Wundauk will be told that I am egging Minkalé on to nunnery, and he'll wish to be rid of me; that's my chance of promotion."

"It is a brilliant thought," said Ko Ba Shin, "and

who would have supposed Tun Min capable of it ? for he is not a born liar."

"He does quite well enough by practice," said Ko MOUNG, by no means pleased at the turn things were taking. "This is an emergency that wants a level head—the head of a man, not the tongue of a boy."

"Why are you alarmed?" asked Ko Ba SHIN, amazed at Ko MOUNG's attitude.

"Who can see where this will end?" said Ko MOUNG, deeply moved. "The rivers that rise in the mountains have their outlet in the sea; but those that rise in the heart often—only too often—flow to the grave."

For several moments no one spoke, but neither Tun Min nor Ko Ba SHIN could account for the gloom that spread itself over Ko MOUNG's features.

"Ko Ba SHIN," said Ko MOUNG after a while, "had better take counsel with the adored Minkalé and her sweet mother; and when Ko Tun Min and I have settled a little business, he, too, can go and join their charmed circle."

Ba SHIN was accustomed to Ko MOUNG's brusque and summary methods, and took his departure without any annoyance. On the contrary, he was only too eager to carry the good news of the double appointment, and there was, moreover, the joke about the Wundauk's amours, and how cleverly Tun Min had outmanœuvred him. He laughed as he shuffled along with the aid of his staff, but gradually the light entered into his mind, and he saw what it was that had alarmed Ko MOUNG, and wondered that he had been such a fool as not to have grasped the full import of the situation.

"I see now," he said, thinking aloud, "the chance

it is for Minkalé too to rise and shine. Ko Tun Min is a very nice boy, but were I a girl I know which I should choose if the Wundauk Min wanted me—and Minkalé is my daughter. She will know a chance when she sees it. Poor Tun Min !”

When Ko Ba Shin had gone, Ko MOUNG beckoned to Tun Min to move nearer to him, and addressed him in a whisper.

“ This is,” he said, “ a grave and delicate matter, and it wants all a man’s wits to keep it on the right track. You and I, if left alone, would finish Walworth Bubbles in as many ‘ chuckers ’ as we pleased ; but there is a pretty and scatterbrained woman in the play. Dance and talk and sing she must—but for whom ? For herself or for Ko Tun Min ? ”

“ I don’t understand.”

“ Surely you see that Bubbles will prove a temptation too strong for her to resist ! Women have their ambition, and in Love’s game you can foul your adversary without limit.”

“ Ko MOUNG is doing Minkalé an injustice.”

“ I hope I am, my son. But be vigilant. In the cup of life there is no bitterness like that of disappointment.”

Tun Min laughed when he thought there was any danger of disappointment to himself, but he agreed with his father that Minkalé had a trying part to play, and one in which she wanted all their resources as well as her own.

CHAPTER V

WHEN MOUNG TUN MIN arrived at MOUNG BA SHIN'S house he knew there was great merriment within, and that the laughter-loving ladies had had their sense of humour considerably tickled. Externally the building resembled his own, as, indeed, did most houses that were built of wood, in two compartments, so to say—one below, and the other above; but as he entered he saw something very different from the cheap Axminster and Donabyu mats that sufficed for Ko MOUNG'S simple tastes. There were gold-skirted mirrors, elegant walnut-wood chairs, and sofas upholstered in crimson plush, a Shan gong that hung between two rudely carved Burmese braves, Benares bric-à-brac, a Satsuma tea-service that stood on an undusted teak sideboard, and vulgar-looking carpets from Agra, that gave the room the appearance of a badly-arranged auctioneer's depot. Tun Min nearly fell over an occasional tea-table in his eagerness to salute his hostess, at which they all laughed, and finally found a resting-place near a Gautama, that looked sadly on an open but empty hand.

"Now, I did hope," said Ma May, his hostess, "that a distinguished guest like Ko Tun Min would like a chair, but——"

"Our national habits," suggested Tun Min modestly.

"And lowly ambitions," said Minkalé, finishing the sentence, "are contented with very much less. I hate a chair myself ; it always gives me pins and needles."

"Much good you got," said her mother, "from your English education at the Rangoon convent ! If I had that money over again which your father foolishly paid the nuns, I should have it out in paddy advances."

To the Burmese materfamilias money has but one function, and that is to earn a dividend. No matter whether she be well or badly off, she will manage to mix a little trade with her daily life, even if it be no more than the manufacture and sale of a hundred cigars, and Ma May had bitterly regretted what she regarded as unproductive expenditure on Minkalé's education. It was a subject on which she waxed more and more eloquent as her temperature rose, but the mere mention, at their present domestic crisis, of the nuns had the effect of provoking a mirth in the presence of which such prosy notions as finance were quickly forgotten.

"I should simply love to be a nun," said Minkalé, looking at Tun Min with an amused smile ; "they were always so sweet ; nothing ruffled them."

"No doubt," said Ma May acidly, "you did your best to annoy them ; but that doesn't qualify for a saintly life. Still, you might play the part."

It is unorthodox in Burmese life for a mother to leave her daughter alone with her sweetheart, but Tun Min and Minkalé had been children together, and, besides, Ma May had her own business to attend to ; so she rose, and, taking up her keys, left the room to the young people, in the hope that the conspirators would

arrange some plan which would have the effect of defeating Bubbles without destroying Mounng Tun Min.

"It was only ambition," said Minkalé, sticking a rose in her hair, "that made you exchange the kyoung for the court."

"Ambition is a chair that two can sit in," said Tun Min, edging closer to her now that Ma May had considerably left them alone.

Minkalé blushed. She had been betrothed by her parents, but she had an inkling that a proposal in the English style would be much more sweet.

"Why does virtue rest in a smelly kyoung?" asked Tun Min, continuing.

"Rest?"

"There are no activities in a kyoung except at lessons. Perhaps, though, you mean the fleas and the bugs; there were plenty of those! Sleep was impossible. Night after night I lay awake and heard the tiny bells of the pagoda 'htee' tinkle in the summer breezes; day after day I heard the weary chant of a hundred tinny voices intoning an oft-repeated lesson."

"You had worked too hard."

"I never did enough."

"Then your digestion was impaired?"

"It was never better. But the food was—well, it was hpoongyi's food cold and stale. No, it was my heart."

"But you left that with the thimbaw-gyi's daughter. She would never lose it for you."

"With more hearts than one, one could afford to be reckless with them and keep them in wrong places; but Minkalé knows that I have only one."

"And, to be sure it was safe, Ko Tun Min buried it in a quiet little grave at the door of his kyoung."

For a moment Tun Min thought her an arrant little flirt, and wondered with whom she had kept her hand in while his own eyes had been turned in the direction of Pali examinations.

"If he did," said Tun Min, looking into her eyes, "then he has dug it up, and now places it at Minkalé's feet."

It was the supreme moment in a woman's life, and Minkalé was charmed with the delicacy of the proposal, but beyond that she did not appear to be moved.

"In novels," she reflected, while neither spoke, "it is orthodox for a girl to weep when she is proposed to, but that must be when she really loves the man. Tun Min will make a nice comfortable husband, but he doesn't altogether fill me with enthusiasm. Still, he is better than any other Burman—and possibly I may never get another chance half so good. He will be very wealthy. He will do."

"It was the vision of Minkalé," said Tun Min, continuing, "my sweetly-scented lily, that roused my nature and perfumed my soul! There are more ambitions than go to make a Woon or a Wundauk, and the kyoung became a desert where there was neither food nor drink for a hungry and thirsty heart. Now somebody knows why I left the chilly, companionless kyoung."

"For the throne of justice," said Minkalé, with banter in her tone.

"Thrones are all very well by day, but even the

incense of worship is sickening after a time, and there is then no place like home."

"Then husbands don't look for worship at home?" said Minkalé in quite her merriest manner.

"Anyhow, he doesn't get it; he's not spoilt—that is, unless he rises to very dizzy imperial heights, where there is neither work to do nor money to spend. Look at the Commissioner and his wife. There is nothing for them to do but to worship each other."

"And if report speaks true, they've found out each that the other is the poorest stuff to make a god or goddess of."

"I promise Minkalé won't be called upon to worship Ko Tun Min."

"Or he me. But let us be serious for a moment. Do tell me something about this golden-headed Wundauk. Mother was saying that he was a real darling, so affectionate and warm-hearted that he loved the whole feminine world."

"Yes, but it isn't the love of a son or a brother. We shall come to that in a bit. But if you've heard anything to his discredit, don't believe it. He's not like other C.S.* men who bully and abuse their subordinates, and think the road was made for them alone to walk upon. He spoke like a man——"

"Like a very wild young man."

"Until the women have tamed us, we men are always wild. I imagine his mother must have died early and have left him without sisters, as mine did me. I must have struck you often as a savage."

"But he can bite and scratch."

* Civil Service.

"Can't I, too? But, seriously, he's very nice, and has promised to help me along. Indeed, he modestly suggested that we should rise and shine together—that's not exactly characteristic of his class."

"You can't make a Dorian of a Mangoe; but we'll say that he is a Netthai Mangoe."

Tun Min laughed at the figure of speech, but thought it odd that she should so soon speak of him as a fruit to be plucked and eaten.

"Of course he expects some return for his favours, and, among others, he suggested that I should introduce him to my lady friends. They all do that. And everybody condones it as natural. In fact, if you ask Ko Moun, he'll tell you that when he was a boy—it was at Ava or Amarapura—I've forgotten—if he wanted a wife he stole her."

"Oh! Weren't the fires of his affections sustained by the love of a single wife? Dreadful man!"

"He is no worse than our Commissioners and Deputy-Commissioners. The fires of imperialism would soon be out indeed were it otherwise."

Minkalé looked at him in wonder and with alarm, but Tun Min's words never failed to carry conviction when he was explaining away a thoughtless statement that had left an unintended impression.

"You were startled at what I said, but if you look into it deeply, what is this new imperialism that throws its shadow on Eastern monarchs—that pulls up old governments and old dynasties by their roots and hurls them into the sea? You ask the Bishop, and he will tell you that the new system is a symptom of great moral depravity, which shows itself far less

in the public acts of officials than in their private lives."

"Then why be an imperial servant?"

"They don't object to a clean knife, if they can get one—when there's cutting to be done. It's simply this. They've got a fiction that they are here for the good of the people; they've got to keep that lie up, and the best way to do it is by distributing a large number of prizes. Naturally they keep the best for themselves."

"Or it wouldn't be worth their while to come."

"But it's quite a useful number that they place at our disposal."

"But where is the charm?"

"Not so much in the power that one wields; it is limited, and most annoyingly subject to appeal. But no one molests you. Mind you, imperialism has its parasites, like policemen and tax-gatherers, and a horde of others who can make life quite unbearable to you unless you make it bearable to them."

"And there are quite nice little pickings, surely? Don't tell me that the wives of distinguished Burmese Judges found their diamonds and rubies in rubbish-heaps."

"That is a sad but solemn fact. Burmese Judges are occasionally distinguished, not for their learning, but for their wealth; but that was so in Mindoon's time, and merely shows the conservatism of our Burmese natures. The pickings, as you call them, however, don't appeal to me. What does is an indefinable something that has nothing to do with money, or with jurisdiction, or with freedom from molestation.

If you look at the C.S.,* what is it that makes him so haughty? It is the subtlest of all delusions. He thinks he is the owner, or rather the mortgagee in possession—that is the imperial instinct. There is nothing so soothing in the doctor's art—not even opium—as the feeling that the sun rises and sets in your honour. That is the imperial emotion."

"It must produce a kind of intoxication," said Minkalé; "for our Lady Superior at the convent, who was an Irish lady, loathed the civilian from the bottom of her heart. She said these boys drank a lot, but it did them less harm than the conceit they had of themselves; they never knew whether they stood on their heads or their heels."

"They did neither, if you ask me. They sat on spring cushions and lay on downy beds."

"I'm sure I shall love to be a little imperial myself, but shall we have very long to wait?"

"That depends; it is a very delicate matter. In the ordinary course it would be months before my turn as the Wundauk's clerk came to me—indeed, it may be years; it may be never. But the Wundauk can either accelerate or postpone that joyous day."

"But he takes a lively interest in Ko Tun Min."

"He takes a much livelier interest in Minkalé."

"And you're not afraid to tell me?"

"Without Minkalé I should achieve little; with her I might reach the throne. No, don't smile. It's nothing very funny. That he should have fallen in love with you at first sight is most natural."

"But poor Minkalé can do nothing."

* Civil servant.

"Not alone. But I have a plan ; it is only hastily evolved, but it'll work."

"Do be quick, or I shall faint."

"It's simplicity itself."

"You mean hypocrisy ?"

"The same thing. I encourage him to persevere and pursue you—you mildly dissuade him—you talk to him of the meritorious lives of nuns—you——"

"Is he the fisher or I ?"

"You're the fish in this pwe. He must be made to feel that the bait is quite good, and that he is certain to get a bite, but that——"

"The fish is off colour."

"We must work this patent of mine for all it's worth. Pegu is not a finishing school, and he is sure to be sent away after six months to study some new and intricate problem, such as bobabaing lands, in Upper Burma, or the fisheries down in Maubin, and we may never get another chance."

"Maubin !" exclaimed Minkalé with contempt. "There are plenty of girls in Maubin, but the men run away from them."

"White men never run away from women. But never mind Maubin. My point is that we must act quickly, and make the pace so hot that we can get all we want in less than six months. Supposing I introduce him to Minkalé to-morrow ?"

"Good gracious ! Must it be so soon ?"

"I was going to suggest to-day, but a little preparation, if not rehearsal, would grease the wheels of my progress. Don't be nervous. He'll do all the talking."

"Then he must be only half a man."

"I don't follow."

"The nuns had a joke about the Christian heaven—that no women would ever get there, as some Divine rules imposed silence for half an hour."

"But that was before the C.S. was invented. He repealed that law, and now he not only lives in heaven, but does all the bucking just when he likes. And his talk is most fascinating. You see, he's the right temperature."

"For what?"

"For love-making, of course."

"Then, as I'm not to be smitten, and am to pretend that the flesh and the devil don't tempt me—as the nuns used to say—am I to be very frigid?"

"No; tepid. In the tropics it is easier, and the Bishop often declared that it was the tepid ones that were the purest bred. You see, honeyed words belong to both worlds. Bitter or insipid words would spoil the game. In fact, if you find that the game has a flavour, pretend you want to make a monk of him."

"Let me see. I'm to set my eyes on the world to come—to be tepid—to say honeyed words—and to convert the wild young Walworth Bubbles to a life of calm and stoical self-denial. Is there any penalty for failure?"

"Ko Moungh will tell you that we're playing with fire."

"I don't at all feel insured. Do you? Supposing we burn our fingers?"

"How?"

" Well, he has resources. And at his temperature the heart doesn't consult the mind. He might run off with me. Then ?"

" That loobydo doesn't live in a lungyi. The Englishman has his ways, and we ours. To him a woman is sport—not business—and in his sporting codes the laws of honour have the fullest expression. Abduction is bad form ; it is worse—it is death and damnation !"

" That doesn't satisfy me. You remember the saya with a face like a cattle-lifter's—the one your father slippered for lying ?"

" No ?"

" He told me that a golden-headed Wundauk would come to Pegu, and that my destiny would immediately alter. He said nothing about——"

" Who or what ?"

" About Ko Tun Min."

" It must have been the same saya as looked into my future and saw that it synchronized with Shway Goung's appearance, but he also said nothing of Minkalé. There is a delicacy in these matters even with coarse-minded sayas, but never mind fortune-telling. It is with fortune-making that we are concerned. Supposing I tell the Wundauk that those Pali scriptures in the glass case are a great curiosity—he'll be sure to want to see them."

" Gracious ! you must be crazy. I simply couldn't interpret them to him if my life depended on it. I'm terrified."

" Be calm. It is he that will unfold their meaning, or, as you say in the kyoung, ' unlock their treasures ' ;

but to me it is little more than any other book. Tell me, then—does to-morrow suit ?”

“ It must,” said Minkalé with resignation; but she was far from happy at the turn things had taken, and did not persuade Tun Min to linger when he professed to have urgent business in the bazaar to attend to in the Wundauk’s interest.

CHAPTER VI

"THEY gazetted me to undergo the usual training," said Walworth Bubbles, as he stood in Captain Cruncher's front veranda sipping his gin and bitters before dinner was announced, "and it's been the most entertaining time of my life. I shall never go out of training."

Cruncher was his Deputy-Commissioner, and had had an adventurous career of many colours before he found a pew in the front rows of imperialism as a member of the Burma Commission. He was a soldier by profession, an insolvent by caste, and had once been a military policeman purely for the purpose of pay. All his ancestors within legal memory had died loaded sometimes with honours, but always with debts, and he himself was born in an atmosphere that was saturated with indebtedness. As a child, he had slept in a borrowed bed, and had dropped in for meals at a friendly neighbour's, but by the time he got to Sandhurst he had fully mastered the secrets that lay in the three great bureaus of Loan, Gift, and Annexation, and was able to flavour his life with luxuries that were never dreamt of in the domestic budget. He at length came to regarding himself with pride, but the probationary period he had to pass with a British regiment was in a chilly temperature

unsuited to any cherished delusions. They knew the type, and as they did not cultivate it themselves, they, for the twelfth time, by methods that were both summary and firm, surrendered the warrior to the warmer embraces of the Staff Corps. There among his caste fellows he found that economy was unknown, but that there was the same generous and inspiring outlook on life as a playground, and that his own views on finance had a wide acceptance. His first season had been full of enchantment. He had enjoyed polo and pigsticking, and with a cutcha honeymoon or two at Mussoorie, he had passed the time swiftly, till quite a roseate future spread itself before his critical eyes. Just then, however, the brutal bill was presented, and, being followed by an equally callous summons, the wretched man's pay was devastated by the locust of attachment. Had he taken it sitting, there was nothing but a yawning grave before him, but he took it riding. In the social code of the East it is correct to go from bad to worse, and to go quickly. A racing stable took the place of polo, and a book-maker that of the sowcar. It was a perfectly natural process in the evolution of a military policeman, and no susceptibilities were wounded. In fact, Cruncher's was a carefully graduated course—British regiment, Staff Corps, Small Cause Court, racing, High Court, Military Police—that the thoughtful alumni of Haileybury, in their paternal wisdom, had prescribed for their indigent sons and grandsons. "The boys will fall," said the prophetic ancestor, "but they must fall lightly." By universal consent, there is nothing softer than the Indian Turf on which financial decrepi-

tude can fall with the hope of a cheery resurrection ; but there was, however, a luckless monotony about Cruncher's falling, and the bankrupt subaltern arrested his last descent on the rugged slopes of our Burmese frontier, where he nimbly alighted as Warden of the Marches, or, as he was officially yclept, an Assistant Commandant of Military Police. There, on the confines of Barbary, he was truly impregnable, for he controlled the channels of communication, and neither writ nor writter could pollute the sanctity of his person or deflect the energies of his pay, and the military policeman kept his vigils among the top peaks, watching the sun rise and set, while callous laws of limitation put to a slow but certain death the numerous offspring of his reckless extravagance. His life, however, was not without excitement, for there were raids and counter-raids, and the pursuit of Chins and Kachins had nasty surprises for the unwary, while there was always the hope that distinguished military service on a pittance would be rewarded with honourable civil employment on a living wage. And Cruncher was not disappointed, for his toilsome years of guerilla warfare, in which he never had a superior, were fittingly recognized by his selection for an executive office of humdrum regularity, in which he never had an inferior.

"Only yesterday," said Cruncher, leading the way to the dining-room, "you wished you'd never come out."

"I'm sure I shall wish it again. It's just a question whether my conscience is at home or abroad."

"What's conscience got to do with it?"

"I've begun fishing in virgin waters," said Wal-

worth with a merry twinkle, "and sometimes I feel I'm compromising both the service and the maiden."

"We've all done it, and compromised nothing and nobody. What might have made you a bit squeamish, though, was your trespass on Croppit's compound."

"I only borrowed her."

"My dear Walworth, in the world of love——"

"All's fair."

"I'm damned if it is!" said Cruncher, with energy. "It isn't the girl I'm thinking of; she's black, and you can have as much or as little of her as you like—and in ways that are dark or fair, according to your tastes. But never dacoit another fellow's harem. Rob him, work his ponies to death, eat and drink him out of house and home, wear his best clothes to shreds and tatters, but, damn it! be a saheb, and leave his girl alone."

"He'll never know."

"No; because he's dead. He fell overboard, and Yoma is now yours."

The two men could talk to one another without restraint, as "Mrs." Cruncher had had a hint to dine out. As a matter of fact, she was then on her way home, hoping to see something of the "darling Wundauk Min" before he left.

"Thank God," said Walworth, "I shan't have to marry Yoma!"

"Marriage with a lady of the country? How awful!"

"Why not?"

"Love," said Cruncher quite seriously, "is an essen-

tially Western product, and there is no exact Eastern equivalent for it. At home they bracket love with milk."

Walworth laughed uproariously, seeing suggestions that did not occur to Cruncher's denser mind.

"It's got to be pure," said Cruncher, continuing, "or they call it by damned nasty names; but here, like the gold and silver of commerce, it's a little alloyed."

"Still, you use it."

"Liberally," said Cruncher; "but not for life, Walworth. And if that's your policy with Yoma or Min-kalé, then you're earmarked for ruin. Look around you, and you'll see the most pathetic wrecks."

"Wrecked on what?"

"On the rock of conjugal fidelity. They married their girls—it was quite unnecessary—it was damned folly!"

"Did Society disapprove?"

"Naturally. It blasted them, for they'd struck at the roots of empire."

"How?"

"It was teaching a subject race the lesson of equality. A fatal thing!"

"And the moral lesson?" asked Walworth, who was enjoying himself.

"There are no morals in my imperial philosophy."

"Never heard of it," said Walworth, sipping a tepid peg. "What does it suggest?"

"A full stomach, a double bed, and a large bank balance, Walworth. I'm eating, drinking, and sleeping imperially. Aren't you?"

"Wait a bit! Isn't there such a thing as 'Double Imperial,' Cruncher?"

"The 'Double,' " said Cruncher, "is redundant. Imperialism duplicates everything. It doubled my pay, my appetite, my capacity for sleep."

"And your sorrows?"

"Those, too, when I was serving under a swine who was qualifying for secretariat honours; but our present Commissioner is a saheb. By the way, when he walks round I have to send Zeta away. Don't you let Yoma show her nose."

"Zeta?"

"Yes. I got into the way of labelling everything as an exhibit. I began with Alpha."

"Did she die?"

"God forbid! She takes her turn like a Cathedral Canon, and comes into residence next month. But, as I was saying, when the Commissioner comes there are a few things his wife should never see."

"She does the inspection?"

"No. But if she saw Zeta, she might ask awkward questions about her own predecessors."

"What an infernal ass the fellow was to marry!"

"So you'd think, Walworth. But sooner or later you're overtaken by a wave that lifts you right out of the sea of curries and concubines, and you're thrown up on your native soil, breathing your native air."

"In your native air, Cruncher, you'd succumb to moral and spiritual pneumonia in a week. You're a jungle bird, and you'd much better stick to your jungle habits in the paddy-fields of Burma."

"Damn the paddy-fields! Do you think that I can

never live the life of a saheb in Belgravia or Mayfair ? I've done it, but doubtless with the noble assistance of a——”

“ Music-hall star ? ”

“ Yesh.”

And then there was a crash, for Cruncher, with his usual regularity in attempting to rise from the table after dinner, lost his balance, and in falling made a clean sweep of the glass within reach. His habits were so well known that his servants were waiting at the door to pick him up and put him to bed.

Walworth was annoyed at what looked like an early termination of what had promised to be quite an entertaining evening, but Zeta had heard the familiar sound of breakage, and was actually standing in the hall as Walworth emerged from the dining-room.

“ You're not going—surely ? ” she asked in a tone of complaint.

“ Not if you'll let me stay ; but, you know, I do so want to have a chat with you.”

“ I hope you won't find me very dull, but I've just left Minkalé, and she was so depressing.”

“ She's supposed to be very good, isn't she ? ”

“ I've no patience,” said Zeta, who was in the secret, and had promised to play her part in the improvised drama as wanted, “ with women who take their eyes off the joys they can have, and fix them on others for which their natures were never intended.”

“ She wants to be a nun, doesn't she ? ”

“ When she was made to be a wife ! It's the mango wanting to be a mangosteen.”

“ Is she very nice ? ”

"Cruncher says she's strawberry and cream."

"And there's no better judge. But tell me, Mrs. Cruncher——"

"Call me Zeta—everybody does who's nice."

To show his appreciation of the compliment, Walworth moved his chair near enough to hold her hand, and he thought it a very pretty hand.

"You're just the dearest girls in the world," said Walworth; "but sometimes I feel that we do you a great wrong."

"Doubtless. But which particular one are you referring to?"

"We offer you a Burmese, not an English, marriage."

"We have the sense," said Zeta, amused at Walworth's prickings of conscience, "to take what we can get, and make the most of it. It's good enough while it lasts."

"Better than marriage with a Burman?"

"Is the dorian better than the maryan? Look at me. I'm the queen of the district, though I'm not really married, and the myook's wife is nobody."

"But which makes the better husband?"

"The one we get," said Zeta, laughing.

"That's only natural; but do you mean to say that you make no differences between valid and invalid marriages?"

"I personally don't. Love's a much older family than Law, and ever so much nicer company."

"So the Law is a low-caste pariah," said Walworth, wondering whether he would ever see things in the light that entered the Burman's eye.

"We men and women," said Zeta, "were made for love, and the Law is a blighter that tries to chill us off! Do you think I respect it? Not I!"

"I wish that were Minkalé's view."

"Ko Walworth has only to persevere, and her eyes will be opened to the silly step she contemplates."

"Then you think there's a chance?"

"I've put my money on you, and if you lose her I lose my bet; there'd be no Naikban for Ma Minkalé—not till she had paid bets all round."

Just then Cruncher awoke, and, finding Zeta missing, called to his boy to go and look for her as though she were a dog.

"I'm afraid I must go," said Walworth; "but may we resume the conversation?"

"Any evening. Good-night."

CHAPTER VII

MINKALÉ, as she stood before the looking-glass finishing her toilet, dropped herself a pretty little curtsy, with a feeling of satisfaction that she was now both adorned in body and equipped in mind to receive the august Wundauk Min, whose advent was not, however, immediately expected by her loving parents; for, with their characteristic devotion to business, they had left the house for the market-place soon after the monks on their mental visiting-list had been furnished with their daily sustenance. Minkalé was alone with her suspicion that the destined hour had struck whereafter her daily life and womanly ambition were to run in unfamiliar but pleasanter grooves, and she felt more than a gentle glow of excitement as she descended the stairs and took up her usual seat on the carpet near the front door. She was fully alive to the potentialities of the part she was called upon to play, much more so than on the previous day, when nothing more than a simple little drama in which Bubbles was to be fooled and preyed on for Tun Min's benefit had been suggested by her unsophisticated and confiding sweetheart. Was she, she asked herself with a quickening pulse, going to be a pawn in Tun Min's game or a queen in her own? Such a question, and at such a time, when she was only just betrothed,

awoke no slumbering conscience, and received no moral chastisement; for even the attenuated notions of fair play that find a chilly corner in Eastern ethics are without a place in the narrower business codes of the Mongolian. He is not without religion. On the contrary, he will, at the smallest glimpse of a distant pagoda, contemplate the cardinal virtues on bended knees; he will, with clasped hands and a reverential mien, recite long strings of words expressing virtuous hopes and convictions, and he will endow with medieval liberality such real and living charities as are closest to hand. But he cherishes no delusions about the proper place for religion, and in business he will not tolerate it at all. His commercial mind is a hereditary gift from an ancient past when religion and business were divorced; and in all mundane matters the one ruling and guiding principle is self-interest. Minkalé was therefore not ashamed of her thoughts, and her cheeks were not suffused with the faint blush of self-reproach. Ko Tun Min, she thought, was a really nice boy who deserved to get on, and she would certainly do her utmost to facilitate the realization of his official ambition. So far she was certainly resolved, and it pleased her to look into his future, and see him prospering as an overworked and highly-respected Judge. But the moment she pictured his home life, and herself as the myook's wife bringing up the myook's children and attending to the myook's daily wants, she thought there was a want of colour in the landscape, which was immediately supplied when she looked out on the Wundauk Min's garden, with its imperial bowers and lawns and drives.

She was fascinated, but were there no dangers ahead ? she wondered. She thought there were when she remembered the pathetic case of Mrs. Dibbs and the soul-shaking tragedy of Mrs. Pumps, who were ruined and then basely deserted ; but, on consideration, she decided that those ladies had been greatly to blame for letting the flame of love that had once burnt brightly in the bosoms of their respective spouses go out. It was true she had heard that Englishmen, as they grew older, exhibited a preference for the ladies of their own race, and discarded their Burmese concubines without compunction, but not without incumbrances ; but again she decided, with the magnanimity of her sex, that the man was not alone to blame. " He," she said to herself, " is the spoilt darling of nature, and if I cease to spoil him he will be sure to go where he is spoilt." But the thought came quick as lightning that she also was fond of more than a little spoiling, and was she sure how much of her own way she would get with the passionate white man ? In a Burmese home the wife is supreme, but she had a shrewd notion that the Englishman was cock of his roost, and that he was reputed to have many unpleasant ways of asserting his authority.

" It is indeed a problem," she said to herself, seizing the betel-box, " but there is a worse. Perhaps I shall get so fond of both Ko Tun Min and the Wundauk that I shall like to be parted from neither. What then ?"

Then, when the full meaning of such a situation beat on her girlish mind, she blushed to think how depraved she was.

"Anyhow," she comforted herself, "Ko Tun Min is a nice soothing sort of boy to be engaged to. He will leave me a broad margin. Wasn't it the Mother Superior who suggested the wisdom of always writing with half margin so as to leave her room for sage corrections? It must be the same in the foolscap of life. Just fancy the hardship of marrying a man who left you no margin at all. What a deadly and appalling catastrophe—my mother! Our thoughts of to-day, our plans for to-morrow, are just like our thameins, in that they want frequent readjustment. And no margin! Well, what blots and smudges there would be if the corrections were made between the lines! The Mother Superior was right. I will and must have a margin, and, just as an experiment, we'll make it three-quarters."

She was a brave girl, but the very next moment she experienced more than a gentle shock when she heard a bluff Englishman asking a wayfarer which was MOUNG BA SHIN'S house.

"This, my lord," said the wood-cutter, as Walworth Bubbles threw him the reins of his pony, and, jumping off, stood at the door of the house rapping his cane on the doorstep, and calling impatiently for the absent house-owner.

"Where the hell are you?" said Walworth, putting his head in.

"I'm afraid both father and mother are out," said Minkalé softly and nervously, perhaps a little afraid that the announcement would suggest to the Wundauk the impropriety of his presence in a Burmese house; but his brain was not a soil in which such notions

grew, and, walking boldly in, he held out his hand to Minkalé, and, apologizing for the warmth of his inquiries, explained that he was there on duty.

"We began taking a census," he said, falling into a chair, "quite a long time ago."

"It was William the Conqueror's patent," said Minkalé, resuming her seat on the floor.

"Go up top! And we liked it so much that we want to introduce you to it. The Government is very particular that we should explain its entire innocence and popularize the scheme; it's quite all right."

"What would you like to ask?" said Minkalé, amused at the thinness of the excuse, but charmed at such an agreeable beginning. "I've nothing to be ashamed of."

"What! no highly infectious vices?"

"But King William never catalogued those. Neither did the Jews, who merely counted heads—not what was in them."

Walworth looked surprised, for he was not prepared for the impression that the girl's bonhomie, combined with her elegant manner, made upon his wholly unsuspecting mind. Like most Englishmen, he thought Burmese girls were toothsome morsels intended to be chewed and spat out when done with; but here, forsooth, was a lady who could hold her own in the gentle art of conversation with the cultured product of western scholarship. His curiosity was thoroughly roused.

"What did they teach you in the Rangoon Convent?" he asked brusquely.

“To be sweet,” said Minkalé; “but they didn’t succeed very well. In England girls are——”

“Don’t say we’re taught other things, though doubtless our manners often suggest it.”

“You’ve got so into the habit of conquering—haven’t you? Conquests must be inspiring achievements. Don’t you, when you’re alone and bored by the peace and quiet of British rule, wish you were Alexander, or Clive, or Napoleon?”

For a few moments Bubbles was absolutely non-plussed and speechless. He had indeed come to conquer, but did not like being told that he had the manners of a conqueror, and he began to feel a suspicion that Minkalé was making a fool of him. But in the past he had never suffered defeat in any of his projects, and he saw no reason why he should attune his mind to failure in either the present or the future.

“Really,” said Walworth, when he had regained his usual equilibrium, “I have the most profound contempt for the men you’ve mentioned; they were for ever committing the deadly sin of moving a neighbour’s boundaries, or making widows of royal wives, and homeless orphans of myriads of helpless infants. Those were the godless days of godless men. Thank God, we make no widows and orphans!”

“I feel the rebuke,” said Minkalé, without in the least looking it. “What a lot of merit you must have accumulated! Your Naikban must be near.”

“Upon my honour! I’ve neither made widow nor orphan, but we never think of merit while we can still season our lives with sage and onions.”

"I know onions, but who's sage? Is she very nice?" asked Minkalé in a childlike tone of innocent inquiry.

Walworth's nature was immediately sensitive to the gentlest impressions from without, and he regarded such a query as making just the very opening his blundering methods had failed to discover.

"Sage is of course a goddess," he whispered. "Has it struck you that it might be yourself?"

A pathetic smile spread on Minkalé's face, and she shook her head.

"Poor me!" she said. "I have renounced——"

"Before you're old enough to know and choose."

"I know the life of a nun inside and out—don't tell me you do!—and it is just the essence of roses—no vexations—no worries—there's the aroma of a saintly and——"

"Purposeless life."

"It keeps one out of mischief, and even you Christians like to give that a wide berth, don't you?"

"Like to? No! Certainly not! Who stuffed you up? English girls and boys are never out of mischief, and never want to be. Don't you believe all those nuns tell you, Minkalé."

"We Burmans are very different. And we find great comfort in a life removed from the world. You ask your interpreter."

"Do you mean Mounng Tun Min?"

"The same. His long years as a monk have completely changed the current of his life."

"The scoundrel has himself chucked the cloister for the forum, and he dares to preach monasticism!"

"He speaks with knowledge, and his return to the world is only temporary. When his purposes are accomplished he will resume his robes."

"The damned villain! I'm awfully sorry," said Walworth, immediately apologizing for the coarseness of his rhetoric. "But if ever I thought there was an open book that a child might read, it was Ko Tun Min—a mere boy with a soaring ambition, but unlikely to play more than a very subordinate part in official life, and now I find you unlocking a sealed mystery. What on earth is he?"

"An evangel."

Walworth laughed uproariously.

"Do tell me what you're laughing at," said Minkalé persuasively, "as I haven't renounced the world of fun—as yet."

"I was just thinking of some of the weird thoughts, Minkalé, that used to course through my imaginative brain in college chapel—it's the cathedral church of the dicoese, with lovely stained windows; you could see picturesque saints and sinners of any variety—and I often wished I was the owner——"

"Of a madonna? Quite natural."

"Sometimes," said Walworth, with just a suspicion of a blush. "But there was one disciple in particular that I should have liked for a valet—halo and all—but I never fancied I should have St. John the Baptist for an interpreter and bench clerk."

"Buddhist saints are never re-incarnated; are the Christian?"

"Upon my soul, I've forgotten! But, just to hark back to Ko Tun Min—is he sincere?"

"Perfectly."

"But he wants to be a myook."

"It would add tons to his influence. Father remembers a missionary-wundauk who used to preach in Fytche Square. He became a secretary——"

"With a beautiful wife. They always become secretaries when the Chief is a bachelor; it is the orthodox channel of rapid promotion."

"Ko Tun Min's eyes are not set on beautiful wives and secretariat pleasaunces; his only humble desire is to earn merit."

Walworth noticed a merry twinkle in Minkalé's eyes, and he guessed that she understood very well the meritorious aspect of feminine beauty; but he was disgusted to think that the instrument he had chosen wherewith to accomplish his selfish purpose was just the very agent who was engaged in spoiling his plans.

"Do you know," he said, more as if he were thinking aloud than trying to communicate his thoughts, "I shall kill Ko Tun Min for preaching that damned old played-out heresy, celibacy!"

"Malé!" exclaimed Minkalé, pretending to be greatly agitated.

"I didn't meant that, of course," said Walworth, reassuring her; "but it occurred to me that Tun Min's evangelism might improve with a little change of air. He wants, not a garden, but a wilderness to train a missionary lung in."

"They've just dismissed the myook of Nyaunglebin," said Minkalé, hoping that the hint would not be lost on the influential Wundauk.

"That myook has fulfilled his destiny at a very opportune moment—damned good of him ! I'm really very sorry—but, you see, I wasn't brought up in the cool shades of a Christian convent."

Burmese ladies have delightful manners, and Walworth was forgiven with just a nod and a smile.

"Well," said Walworth, with some determination, "I shall abate the missionary nuisance somehow ; but Nyaunglebin is rather near, and I have a suspicion that they want a more experienced officer for that charge. Cruncher, however, will know, and is doubtless racking his great mind to know how to get a competent man when they've all been lent to pacify the upper province. We can assist his fatigued imagination, can't we ? But, God in heaven ! there's MOUNG BA SHIN sitting outside like a Gautama under that tree."

"And it's my sweet mother by his side."

"But why don't they come in ?"

"They are afraid, and wish to salute you reverentially at the gate when you pass out. Believe me, they don't mean to be rude."

"Come along in, MOUNG BA SHIN," said Walworth in a tone of encouragement. "I'm glad to have had the chance of meeting you and explaining what a census is, and that you're not to be frightened when I ask you to fill in a paper stating how many wives and children you're blessed with."

Minkalé smiled at the resurrection of a shallow excuse for a very agreeable invasion, but Ma May was visibly annoyed at the suggestion that her husband might be revelling in more wives than one. She,

however, discreetly held her tongue for, as Minkalé rightly guessed, the first and only time in her long life.

"The akhunwun, my lord," said Ba Shin, shikoing, "did mention the imposition of a few new taxes."

"Damn him! His neck was made to be wrung! Doubtless he's putting a few on of his own invention. But it's the census I'm talking about. We don't want any trouble, and you must use your great influence to popularize the idea. You will, of course, want to have it explained to you in detail, and as it is a novelty, you'll be sure to misunderstand much that is of importance unless I give the matter my personal attention. Moun Ba Shin's house must be the local centre from which all illuminating information on the subject must radiate. This will be my headquarters. Good-bye for the present, but I shall soon be back, and hope I shan't forget to bring the prescribed forms with me. It was silly of me to forget them."

Walworth mounted his pony, and, waving his hand to Minkalé, soon passed from view.

"He must be a wild beast," said the indignant Ma May, "to have stayed when he knew we were out."

"He is the most delightfully frank and simple-minded fool that I ever knew," said Minkalé; "and when you hear in the course of the day that Ko Tun Min has been recommended for a myookship, you'll marvel——"

"At the impression my daughter has made? I gave up marvelling when they sent Theebaw down to the river in a bullock-cart—confusion to them! He

will send his bed in next, and you may be sure it's a double one. In the days of our own King—of blessed memory—when we lived at Sagaing, we knew all the Englishmen in the residency; they didn't charm us, but they were never rude."

"You wear a conqueror's head on your lovely shoulders, and it'll fall off if you bow and shiko and scrape. The heads of conquest must always be erect."

"And the conqueror's tongue?"

"Like his heart," said Minkalé, "it has a tropical temperature. But I like it none the less for that."

"That," said her father, after expectorating freely into a majolica spittoon, "is no criterion. Hungry men have keen appetites—strong men use strong language. Besides, the saya will tell you that swearing is good for the liver. When he runs out of mercury and podophyllin, he prescribes a moral and spiritual irritant, and the copious flow of bad language that ensues clears the liver of its humours for weeks."

"Bother the saya! and at Ko Ba Shin's age he should be off with flippancy," said Ma May in a tone of great annoyance. "But let us hear about this myookship. It must be nonsense, for the newborn interpreter hasn't even had the time to give the Wundauk Min his first Burmese lesson."

"Oh yes, he has!" said Minkalé, with a merry laugh. "My introduction to his majesty was the first lesson, and I verily believe the last, for Shway Goung will see no more of him."

"How's that?"

"I've left an indelible impression that it's on Ko

Tun Min's advice that I'm renouncing what the Mother Superior used to call 'the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.' I can assure you Shway Goung is in a perfect fever to get my merry monk transferred to the uttermost parts of the earth—and he'll succeed."

"That, the silly idiot thinks, will clear the way for him. Well, you can tell him, with my compliments, that it won't," said her mother, with characteristic energy.

CHAPTER VIII

"HULLO!" shouted Cruncher, as he heard Walworth's deep voice coming up the drive, inquiring whether he was in.

"I hear," said Walworth, blowing a kiss to Zeta as she cut round the corner, "that Nyaunglebin's in the grip of a scoundrel?"

"The grip's been relaxed; the rascal's been sacked, and is now in gaol. Do you know, they'll never get the Upper Province straight. They've taken our best myooks, but they are all the same, whether they're chevying dacoits or the revenue."

"I can fill the vacancy all right without making a fuss," said Walworth, opening Cruncher's capacious cigar-case and helping himself to a weed that had the right aroma.

"Will you really go to Nyaunglebin?"

"On my next honeymoon. But meanwhile I have quite a promising candidate in my bench clerk. Only I know nothing of the principle on which myooks are appointed. Do you?"

"Do I? I have many gifts, but the talent for making and marring myooks is never allowed to rust. Making, did you say? Everybody has his pet theory. For instance, there's the myook of legend whose judicial

capacity was inferred from the devotion with which he fed the secretary's ducks. You don't believe it, but I do ; and, what's more, I've made that principle of selection my own."

"Did you ever own a duck that was worth a damn?"

"You don't grasp the principle. I mean that I recommend a man I like—never one that I dislike."

"And his fitness?"

"That I leave to him to cultivate."

"Well, if you haven't a passion for a syce or a sweeper of your own, do you think you could take a liking to a nominee of mine?"

"Who?"

"My bench clerk—a damned clever boy! Passed the patmabyan at eighteen. He has hereditary claims, as his father piloted many a column pacifying Meiktila and Yamethin—or was it Taungdwingyi? The Bishop vouches for him."

"We don't care a damn for Bishops, black or white, on this side of Suez! But what do you know of the boy that I don't?"

"I've only had him a day."

"And with your instinct for failures and fools——"

"Failure be blowed! He's a genius—monk, scholar, missionary. He's a sort of double incarnation of the Evangelist and the Baptist rolled up in one—bursting with character. Just the man for you!"

"He's the kind of man," said Cruncher coldly, "that we put in gaol. A sort of Christ, you mean? The Romans crucified them, but we are less brusque,

if equally intolerant—we send them to the Andamans.”

“He’s no fanatic who turns temples upside down, but he’s death on marriage.”

“Now, Walworth dear,” said Cruncher, with a wicked smile, “I begin to see the light. There isn’t much room for you in his philosophy.”

“Room?”

“Bedroom, if you like it better. But you’ve boned his girl, and look to Imperialism to compensate him.”

“Blow your persiflage! Services are rewarded, aren’t they?”

“With judgment and generosity.”

“Always?”

“Always.”

“Must the service be public or private?”

“Private, certainly—and the more private the better. Don’t mention it, but both Zeta’s brothers are swelling the ranks of Imperial myooks.”

“I expect you started making myooks quite early in life.”

“I’m not a bit ashamed, Walworth. It’s, moreover, a game in which you’ve snatched a blue.”

“Thanks. That means you’ll nominate Tun Min?”

“Immediately. Spring will wire, appointing him. He can pack his portmanteau. But this is the quickest acknowledgment of a private service I’ve ever known. Is the service a dead secret?”

“Not in the least. I gave him an order that Min-kalé was to be at home when I called.”

"The order was obeyed?"

"In the most liberal spirit. I was alone with Minkalé while her parents camped out under a tamarind-tree in an attitude of adoration. Is that good manners when a white man visits a daughter of the house with the intention of appropriating her?"

"I never studied their manners. I was content to impose my own."

"That's Imperial," said Walworth, picking up his hat to go. "But I think it is perfectly useless for us to expect them to change their fashions—not that I want them to, God bless my soul! But that's our *raison d'être*, isn't it?"

"When I'm feeling very dull, Walworth——"

"You send your messengers out to scour the earth for Walworth Bubbles, your favourite clown?"

"I do nothing so damned foolish! I trot out instead all our pet Imperial theories of sacred trusts, of uplifting Western civilization, of touching the great heart and lively imagination of the Orient with the wand of Western erudition, and I simply——"

"Shake with savage laughter?"

"No; I then affect the secretariat smile of contempt."

"That becomes neither your beauty nor the great heart and lively imagination of the virtuous Zeta. But the tin kettle for gratitude is certainly yours—you say you receive benefits, but confer none?"

"Not directly—unless I'm in church, and the Commissioner is handing the hat round. But I'm blaming

nobody. On the contrary, there's nothing that makes my democratic blood circulate so freely as to see the lever India's been in raising our lower-middle class to the proud and dizzy heights of an Imperial aristocracy."

"I'm a shopkeeper's son," said Walworth, with becoming humility.

"And here you are a grand duke with quite a comfortable number of grand duchesses."

"Yes, but I have a suspicion that my ducal status is the child of business, and not of pleasure; and, what's more, that it was made by a long series of high-minded soldiers who were earnestly regenerating the East. Do you reap where neither they nor you have sown?"

"I am content to reap without inquiring who has sown," said Cruncher, showing signs of weariness.

It is certain that there is no quarter of the civilized world that is as well ruled as India, and it is equally certain, were British control withdrawn, that the Indian sun would immediately blaze on an ocean of blood and anarchy; but, still, there are those who, in season and out, maintain that we are here solely for our own benefit, as though such a political anomaly were possible.

"You've been drinking ginger-beer?"

"I have; but what makes you ask?"

"That's exactly where you get your mawkish political philosophy from. But, Cruncher, I've wasted a lot of time, and have none to spare. We have finished with Tun Min, but may I see Zeta

for a moment? Just a simple little bit of business."

"Zeta has no business but what I approve."

"I think you'll approve; it's a perfectly proper scheme."

"I'm not so sure."

"I want Zeta to ask Minkalé and myself to lunch. You go to office, and Zeta—she goes shopping. Quite simple."

"Really, Walworth, you make me doubt my identity. When I've had the smallest dose of you, I feel as if a brutal and unskilled surgeon had had my liver and lights out, and had spat on them and put them back upside down."

"Does your practical mind," said Walworth, quite unperturbed, "suggest a better idea?"

"Your proposals are the very height of indelicacy——"

"Or Minkalé could go on a visit to your Alpha, Beta, or Gamma—and I could get just a little casual leave, couldn't I?"

"Worse and worse! Violence, whether it be moral or muscular, will not mix with the kingdom of heaven——"

"I know nothing of the kingdom of heaven; but the Crown of England's been in scrum often enough, and that's a lesson we don't forget."

"Well, well, Walworth, you were sent to me for training, and I must be loyal to the best traditions of the service. I confess I don't like it."

"Then get out of the way, as I suggested! Leave it to Zeta and me."

"Thank you, no. I'm in no hurry to look out for Theta. But I shall abet you myself, as the criminal law says. Do you know the Goanese lady who mixes confectionery with lacemaking hard by Algie's Bridge?"

"No."

"I'll speak to her. She was my confederate, and I saw Zeta when I liked. She is a most obliging person."

"Name?"

"Something like D'Bug, or D'Cockroach, or D'Stink—she didn't mind which you called her. But her parlour was quite a nice place for a brief courtship."

"Oh," exclaimed Walworth, taking up his hat for the twelfth time, "it's the D'Bugs and the D'Stinks that inspire loyalty to service traditions! Good-bye, Cruncher. When I've seen Tun Min and packed and labelled him for Nyaunglebin——"

"That would be fatuous."

"Why?"

"It is not an appropriate setting for an uncut stone. Your own corners are being rounded off in Pegu. The finished article will be sent to Nyaunglebin."

"The sample we put in gaol?"

"Exactly! Moug Tun Min may be sent to me for training."

"Then I should kill him. The damned ruffian's spoiling all my plans, stuffing the young women up with the saintliness of celibacy! No, no——"

"I find one pupil fatiguing enough, Walworth;

don't be afraid. But that Tun Min will want watching, and I don't altogether like the character you give him. Those boys get to the gallows in time."

"Don't care a damn, provided I get Minkalé—and I certainly shan't while he preaches."

"You need never be afraid of preachers in Burma. Look around you, and be comforted. What way has Christianity made with the discriminating Burman?"

"I expect the Burman likes the missionary well enough. His children are well taught, and for nothing."

"But what he likes much better are the arms and ammunition that the apostles are not above doing a little trade in. For his religion, however, he has no respect whatever."

"Because he feels he has a better?"

"No. It is the white saheb that sets the fashion, whether it's Bass's beer or brown boots, and——"

"And, Cruncher, you mean that our gay lives don't altogether advertise apostolic precepts? But there are the women and children."

"A religion that's adapted to the tastes of English women, and to the necessities of Eurasian children——"

"Bastards?"

"Yes. Well, what's the good of talking about it? You and I don't live religious lives, and you and I alone stand for Imperialism in Pegu. We are the copy-book precepts that the young Burman is taught to copy, and——"

"By God! he does it well. Then why be afraid of Mounng Tun Min?"

"They get a little more English than the English."

"That's what Cambridge men say of the Babu who is seen with Rahab at Ditton corner; but Tun Min's exactly the reverse."

"He has originality, and influence — like ourselves — and ambition. All dangerous qualities in a subject race. And more than all, he has brains. If Spring knew that, it would be fatal to his chances."

"How do you know that?" said Walworth, rising to go.

"He practically told me that I owed my promotion to the fact that I was a 'safe' man; later on he told me I was a damned fool! I'm sure to be a Commissioner if I live. But Tun Min's not the right sort to recommend to Spring."

"I'm blowed if I'm going till it's been done! What's worse for you, I'll go upstairs and talk to Zeta for a bit——"

"I'd rather write to Spring. But the responsibility is yours. If Tun Min begins to dream dreams that he is invulnerable, and raises the standard of rebellion, remember you're his sponsor. Good-bye."

Rebellion is seriously viewed and sternly suppressed, but still there is no adventure on which the Burman will embark more light-heartedly than the capture of a fortified city with a few useless matchlocks and dahs, and all because the leader, or Boh, was blessed with a dream in which his invulner-

ability was revealed. Samples of these psychological puzzles are by no means rare in either province, and Cruncher was more than a little apprehensive that Tun Min was an embryo Boh ; but on reflection he decided to take the risk, and the nomination was posted.

CHAPTER IX

SEVERAL days after Cruncher's nomination of Moun-
g Tun Min had been sent in, the latter received, much
to his surprise, a letter from the owner of a house at
Shwegyn, offering to let it to him at the moderate
rental of twenty rupees a month, and was puzzled to
know what to think of it.

"That," said his father, after a critical examina-
tion of the address, "is the very first letter in English
that you have ever received, and I regard it as a lucky
omen that it offers you a house."

"I wish," said Tun Min, puckering up his mouth,
"that I were sure it was intended for me. Anyhow,
whoever wrote the address went out of his way to
indicate the addressee, for he says 'Tun Min, Esq.,
Son of Ko Moun-
g, 127, Riverside,' and I am your son,
am I not?"

"No man, woman, or child, Burmese or Kala, sane
or insane, will claim to inherit my fortune as against
you when my funeral pyre has ceased to smoke. And
that letter was meant for none but you. Moreover, it
is good news."

"Was it revealed to you in a dream?"

"My intelligence works better when I am fully
awake, and it has a vast store of experience to draw

upon. You don't believe it, but my detective skill was highly valued by Mindoon Min's Yazo Woons. Not that I wanted to bring criminals to justice, but success tickled my vanity, and practice kept the faculty from rusting."

"This," said Tun Min, with equal impatience and disrespect, "is no time for autobiography. Why should you think that the letter is genuine? Why should you think it lucky?"

"Rinse your mouth with ice-water and be calm. That rascal of a house-owner has a friend in the factory where a myook's commission is made, and in this country, if you pay for it, there is no secret that you cannot buy."

"But has the great Government no confidential clerks?"

"They have; and don't I know their little tricks! It was examination time, and I saw them going into the printing-press one day with lovely white trousers on and long coats—Babu fashion. I can see, taste, and smell a fraud with the quickness of lightning, and I arrested those printers."

"What did you find?"

"Just this: they had pulled up their coats and sat on the type, and then let their coat-tails down again. As a myook, it may be of use to know that the cleverest frauds are, without exception, the simplest."

"I see, that's why the Government made you a K.S.M.?"

"Yes."

"What did you do with the decoration?"

“ There was a clown who amused me greatly ; in fact, my recollection of his jokes makes me laugh even now when I wake up in the middle of the night. I am never really alone when I think of him. Well, he just wanted to include the chain amongst his stage properties, and it did me good to see him pirouetting about in it.”

“ You treated an honour with contempt. The Sayadaw would call it sacrilege.”

“ He’s not such a fool. Do you think he doesn’t know the difference between twelve and twenty-two carat gold ? You try that game on with him when he’s engaged in gilding the Pagoda, and you’ll be nearer Naikban than you think. Well, I’ve told you my views, and now that I have to be off to a meeting of the loogyis,* you’d better go and see Minkalé. Perhaps she has the gift of second sight.”

Moung Tun Min was restless, and his first impulse was to show the letter to the Wundauk Min ; but on second thought he decided that Minkalé had the prior right, though her powers of interpreting the letter were doubtless inferior. He put it in his pocket, and, hastily rolling himself a betel-chew, started for Moung Ba Shin’s house, which was only a couple of hundred yards away. Minkalé was certainly at home, but both her parents were out, and it would therefore not have been correct for Tun Min to enter, so he sat on the step outside, from where he could both see and hear his lady-love. She was elegantly dressed, and her head and ears simply shone with diamonds. Tun Min guessed she was got up to receive the Wundauk Min,

* Elders.

and was delighted, feeling the most supreme confidence in her attachment to himself and in her talents for befooling importunate suitors.

"I hope nothing has ruffled Ko Tun Min," said Minkalé, when they had exchanged greetings, showing that she had noted his troubled look and serious tones.

"Not ruffled, but puzzled," said Tun Min, withdrawing the letter from his pocket and tossing it to her. "What does Minkalé make of this?"

"This is simply lovely!" she cried in ecstasy. "Of course, it can mean but one thing."

"What?"

"That you are appointed and posted to Shwegyn. How dense you are!"

"I don't believe it."

"It isn't because you don't want to," said Minkalé, with a smile. "It's some little superstition. You were born on a Sunday, whereas to-day is Saturday, and you think it's the wrong day for good news. Don't be silly! I've had the most valuable presents on every day of the week, and to me all days that the sun shines are alike—joyous."

"Well, Ko MOUNG agrees with Minkalé," said Tun Min, shaking his head dolefully.

"And he knows how to put life into a dead secret."

"He must have kept bad company as a boy, but he's making up for it now."

"Ko MOUNG," said Minkalé, shaking her bejewelled head, "is a man of the world, who knows the human type inside and out by heart. He arrives by instinct in a single instant at conclusions that you and I only

reach after hours of brain worry and doubt. You may be sure he has guessed correctly. I think we ought to be very thankful."

"Does Ma Minkalé think she will like Shwegyn?"

"Its approaches as you go down the river are lovely. How the lights and shades on the background of hills vary as the bends of the river take you here and there and show you every side of a pretty picture! I myself like the roseate hues of early morn best, but I can recall one evening, as we drew near in a sampan: there was in the hills just the weird and mystic light of a Burmese sunset that mixed and emphasized the most pleasing colours. My imagination was touched, and I thought of enchanted castles and dragons—but it was all a delusion. When you once arrive at Shwegyn, those pictures are no more, and you feel they've been stolen. But, still, it is a pretty place to live in, and Ko Tun Min will be very busy furnishing."

"We are assuming too much," said Tun Min, who was half afraid that destiny took a malignant pleasure in disappointing castle-builders; but it struck him that he might really be going away in a few days, and that a reference to the time when he might claim Minkalé was not altogether inappropriate.

"When will Minkalé," he asked, "want to see the gold and purple patches on those hills again? The boat and its rower will be waiting at Poozonmyoung for her ladyship at any time. Shall we say when the royal Padouk has flowered, and Shwegyn is really golden?"

"My mother! Next March or April? Oh, no!"

“ Why not ? ”

“ We can get much more out of Ko Walworth if we wait. Zeta was telling me that Captain Cruncher thought him far and away the cleverest man in the country—one who was sure to be caught up and enthroned in the secretariat.”

“ What, really ! ”

“ Yes. And then—oh, the joy of it ! He is a mental prodigy, and in a few months will have the making and unmaking of Wundauks in his hands ; and if I can only impress it upon him in the moments he wastes upon poor me that Ko Tun Min is a star that shines better the higher he rises, he might give it a loftier berth in heaven.”

“ Delay,” said Tun Min, remembering one of the Bishop’s maxims, “ is a tree that bears fruit which sometimes is sweet.”

“ It is always sweet if the plant is well watered and manured.”

“ And your tall and sturdy plant has a skilful gardener. But tell me, what impression has he made on you ? Opinions of him vary so much.”

“ Do they ? ”

“ Tradesmen love him. He buys largely and pays promptly. And his cook simply swears by him as the finest judge of good cookery in a white skin. But ask Bindasery the peon what he thinks of his master. The poor man is afflicted with the ninety-six sicknesses all brought on by Waunduk’s warm and picturesque rhetoric.”

“ Rhetoric, do you call it ? You mean a horny hand and a hefty foot. And a Kala peon was made

to be beaten. Don't you waste any sympathy on him. But how do you like Ko Walworth?"

"He's the most gullible man I know. He swallowed that fib about your renunciation of the world all right; but he did give me an uncomfortable time after he got back. He held me with both hands out of the top window till I promised to preach marriage to every woman, young and old, that I ever met. I should have been killed if I hadn't."

Minkalé laughed merrily as she pictured him struggling and gibbering in Walworth's grip on the brink of eternity, and Tun Min was visibly annoyed at her mirth.

"I'm sure it was nothing to laugh at," he said reprovingly.

"We'll make him pay for that," said Minkalé, taking no notice of the rebuke. "Such treatment has a large equivalent in Imperial compensation. Leave it to me to work."

"My mother! He'd kill me outright if he thought I'd told you!"

"I can say a pleader told me."

"He's simply lovely on the subject of pleaders. He has sworn on the Christian kyanza that he'll have the entire Pegu Bar in penal servitude before his next birthday. And if he hears they've been spying on his house, he'll have them in quod before tiffin. But tell me, who was Ananias?"

"Why?"

"According to Ko Walworth, it was he that bred a sturdy race of liars and settled them on our fertile Burmese soil."

"He was a myth. The Jews attribute their love for the truth to the awful fate of their masculine liars, of whom Ananias was quite a paltry type."

"I see. The term is mere abuse. He's a master in that art. Have you heard him swear?"

"Rather! And, to tell you the truth, his naughty words don't sound a bit wicked when he speaks them; but he must be a bit daft!"

Minkalé said this, and the colour mounted to her cheeks till Tun Min thought she must be recalling some blazing indiscretion of her own, but it was only the memory of some of Walworth's characteristic pleasant-ries, of which good taste was not usually a distinctive feature.

"He isn't mad," said Tun Min, with assurance; "but he's a strange compound of storms and lulls. Only he keeps his stormy side for the world of men."

"He has many sides, some passionate and some funny. He does say the drollest things, and I often wonder whether he regards us as being without any sense of humour."

"But he's seen you laugh?"

"Uproariously! And he wondered why. But what do you think he said?"

"I expect it was something hot."

"No; but it was full of seasoning. He said that curries, when cooked, should be eaten, and that if he didn't eat me somebody else would."

"That young man has curry on the brain," said Tun Min, covering a smile with his hand.

"But he wants it in his mouth, and it puzzles him

to know how to get it from the one place to the other."

"Well, he's keeping the goldsmith fully employed. I expect he'll be laying diamonds and emeralds in new and lovely settings at your feet. What then? Ko Tun Min, the overworked and ill-used drudge, will soon be forgotten."

"What do they say? That we forgot our joys, but never our sorrows."

"Where do I come in?" asked Tun Min, wondering whether he would ever see Minkalé serious.

"Where Ko Walworth goes out, of course," said Minkalé, quite at her best when fencing with awkward questions.

Just as Minkalé said this, a hurricane swept down the road and pulled up at Ba Shin's door. It was a score of boys, who had been playing outside Ko Moun'g's house, when he put his head out of the window, and promised a rupee to the first of them who could find Tun Min, and tell him that the postman had just left an official cover for him. They knew where he was with the omniscience that characterizes the Asiatic, and it was a race for Ba Shin's house, but it was a shrieking chorus that announced the news, and not the winner of the race alone.

"There it is," said Minkalé, clapping her hands with delight. "Run and read."

But it was unnecessary to suggest haste to the impatient Tun Min, who left without ceremony the instant he grasped the full purport of the news. But as he ran, with his long black hair hanging down his

back, and holding his silk putsoe with both hands, he half doubted whether some acute disappointment were not in store for him.

“ If,” he solemnly vowed, “ it has come, then I shall build a Pagoda, and distribute new robes among the old monks. But it is too good to be true.”

CHAPTER X

So great was the augmentation of the myooks' cadre necessitated by the annexation of the Upper Province, that practically any respectable Burman with a knowledge of English who chose to ask for a myookship was hastily equipped and given a charge of a more or less mixed character, in which judicial and executive functions were blended as they then were throughout the subordinate services. Sometimes there were failures, but far more often the nature of the man responded to the nature of his task, and officers shone in administrative posts simply by coming within the magical influence of an honourable administration. It was in these emergent conditions that Tun Min received his first commission, and was, much to his delight, posted to Shwegyn for his first training. That it was a decaying district about to be dismembered did not concern him. It was enough that he was a star, though still a very pale and watery one, in the Imperial firmament ; but he was a rising star, and in that knowledge both he and his friends rejoiced. The occasion was, indeed, celebrated with pwes, and in the impromptu performances both Walworth and Tun Min were represented as garlanded heroes enjoying a triumph on their victorious return from a war of

conquest. The romantic soul of the Burman, in fact, ran riot, while Ko MOUNG gladly paid the bill, till at last the time came for Tun Min to say good-bye, and Pegu gave him a send-off of which a Commissioner might have been proud. But as the train steamed out, Tun Min thought he detected just a little less of the familiar warmth in Ba Shin's usually affectionate manner ; but he was not accustomed to brood over the temperature of his friends, and he dismissed the subject from his mind to think of the official greatness that now lay before him.

MOUNG Ba Shin, too, as he wended his way home, excluded Tun Min from his thoughts with a sigh of relief, for he thought the way was now cleared for the progress of the Wundauk Min, who was taking a very thorough census indeed of the family into which Minkalé had had the good fortune to be born. MOUNG Ba Shin had been a confirmed intrigant most of his life, and having first abetted the suit of Tun Min, was now equally at home in seconding the ambition of the amorous Assistant Commissioner. Walworth had, in fact, become a daily visitor, and as MOUNG Ba Shin approached his house he saw the familiar spectacle of the Wundauk's pony tied to a tree outside, while the poor beast stood on three legs and gazed at the door, as if he were wondering what on earth his august master found so engrossing in a humble Burmese dwelling.

"Has he gone?" asked Walworth, as Ba Shin shikoed, and sat down at the door with his hands uplifted in adoration before him.

"He has, my lord."

"Thank God! It was those maudlin monks who put these mischievous ideas into his immature mind. Did they put a lump of ice on your heart, Moun Ba Shin, when you were a monk conning your sacred scriptures?"

"I ran away on the third day, my lord."

"Who with? Ma May?"

"Indeed, then, Ma May was not even born," said his hostess, in an acid whisper, while she leant over her betel-box and looked into it to see whether it needed replenishing.

"You Burmans are gay dogs quite young," said Walworth, without in the least suspecting that his levity would strike the Oriental mind of his audience as most undignified. "But why did you run away?"

"I was sick."

"Of prayer and fasting?"

"Sick of having to think for myself, and do nothing but think, whereas I had been accustomed to do nothing but play."

"At what age does a Burman begin to think?" asked Walworth, turning towards Minkalé, as if he intended her to enlighten him.

"Why, of course," said Minkalé, with a smile, "when he becomes a monk."

"Does he go on thinking when he's chucked his robes and kyoungs, and all the melancholy paraphernalia of monasticism? Or does he unselfishly delegate the arduous duty?"

"If he's married," said Minkalé, "the duty devolves on his wife."

"And if he is unmarried?"

"His mother."

"I see," said Walworth, without meaning to be rude, "that Burmans regard the theory and practice of thinking with contempt, which accounts for the milk in the cocoanut."

"Whose cocoanut?"

"I mean that explains the supremacy of women in Burma."

"Is it otherwise in England? I thought it delightful to see the respect the Chief Commissioner paid his wife when they came to give away the prizes to the convent girls. It was she who actually gave them, while he stood behind, looking the picture of pleasure. He did admire her, and we him."

"I was sure you hadn't got the impression from Mrs. Cruncher," said Walworth, afraid to commit himself to any particular view on English domestic relations, but glad to be able to mention the Crunchers, and note whether Minkalé's ambition had never been stirred by the heights to which Mrs. Cruncher had climbed.

"He might call her by worse names than he does," said Minkalé pityingly.

"Good Lord! He doesn't abuse the poor child, I hope!"

"He calls her by a Greek letter," said Minkalé; and then both she and Walworth burst out laughing, while Ma May left the room in disgust at what she regarded as quite unbecoming familiarity between the boy and the girl. Moreover, she doubted whether it was good for the fable that Minkalé had turned serious with the intention of renouncing the world. But Ba

Shin was delighted, and his manly bosom swelled with pride as he looked at Walworth and wondered how soon the plot would thicken.

"As a rule," said Walworth, "they put Greek letters to prosaic uses in the sciences, but Cruncher has made ample atonement by conferring one on the beautiful Zeta."

"Oh, do you think her so very beautiful?" said Minkalé, affecting surprise.

"Perhaps I should have said bewitching. But Cruncher regards her as a pearl, and is fearfully jealous. He was saying he lived in dread that one or more of your loobyos would run off with her."

"This is Captain Cruncher's first incarnation."

"You mean to say he's a fool?"

"The same thing."

In Burma, and more particularly among the Shans on our borders, mental weakness is regarded as symptomatic of a first incarnation, in which the accumulated experience of a previous existence, or what is called instinct, never enters, and for this reason fools and idiots are good-naturedly received with a large measure of indulgence.

"You don't like Zeta, then?" said Walworth, anxious to know whether his selection of the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow for his courtship had been unfortunate.

"On the contrary, I'm very fond of her; but she's a frivolous woman, who was made for love—and she fulfils her destiny. In our old convent days she was most unsuccessful in examinations, but she was our most amusing wit."

"Do I see a lady graduate before me?" asked Walworth, noting the feline infelicity of the reference to Zeta's failures.

"No, unless your vision is very oblique; but we were never allowed to get as far. You see, the good nuns were thinking much more of the next life than of this, so we skipped such earthly interests as trigonometry. By the way, did you hear that heaven had been triangulated?"

"The heaven they mentioned at Oxford was musical—but never mind that. I was thinking how nice it would be if we could meet under Zeta's roof; my work takes me there every day."

"Ma Le! Then how is it that we've never met? It's pure pleasure that takes me there, and I'm there every evening. Your eyes were on your work, or you'd have seen me."

"What!" exclaimed Walworth, shocked to think that Cruncher, knowing his leanings, had never put opportunity in his way.

"Well, perhaps not every evening; but Zeta and I manage to meet somewhere every day, and really it isn't very difficult in a small place like Pegu, where everybody is interested in everybody else."

"And what do you do when you meet?" said Walworth, feeling uneasy as though circumstances had only pretended to be ruled by him, whereas they had been gently pulling his leg.

"We put our tongues to several more or less natural uses. Zeta is quite a good talker, with a lively imagination and a delightful sense of humour, and she does make me laugh till my sides ache when she mimics

Captain Cruncher's after-dinner manner. You know, he rises from the dinner-table——"

"He never rises from it; he falls, and is picked up. There's nothing very funny about that."

"I'm not so sure," said Minkalé, disagreeing. "I once saw David Garrick at the Rangoon Assembly Rooms, and there was an A.D.C. in the drunken part—well, I needn't say more than that it suited his genius and our coarse tastes, as you would call them."

"What does Zeta say about the world of love? And doesn't she think your judgment at fault when you talk of taking the veil?"

"She simply doesn't believe me. And as for the kingdom of love, she is a queen in it, and is that not enough?"

"But she's only one queen of many, isn't she?"

"They never meet. She doesn't mind. You see, he's much older than she, and so he began to practise the art of crowning long before she had the right to put a limit to it. But, you know, there would be awful ructions if they did meet."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, we have a very antiquated custom. The senior queen has the legal right to slipper all junior queens once a year."

Walworth laughed to think what would happen to Minkalé if Yoma, who was now on his "staff," took it into her Burmese head to vindicate her supremacy.

"But, joking aside, Minkalé, doesn't Zeta try to convert you?"

"She is a good Buddhist, and it would be a sin for her to interfere. The demerit of the deed would be

dreadful, and—who knows?—she might be born a snake the next time she appeared on earth. The Nats never forgive.”

“Rot!” said Walworth, forgetting that he was addressing an orthodox Burman. “She can’t be such a fool. But, tell me, there are more ways than one of accumulating merit, surely! For instance——”

“Your recommendation of Ko Tun Min now will bring you as much merit as Ko MOUNG has achieved by the erection of a fresh-water fountain for the thirsty; and if you only got him made a Tsitkay——”

“Then you mean that I should be ripe for Naikban! No, thank you! To be obliterated in my youth, just when the plums of life are beginning to fall into my open mouth! If I’m seriously threatened, I’ll sponge out that good mark at once by killing somebody. But, Minkalé, we are constantly straying from a point I want to get you to. Doesn’t a good wife stand the same chance of Naikban as a good nun?”

“Naikban never wants a wife,” said Minkalé, with a merry laugh, in which Walworth joined. “She’s too well known to have lived a life in which the cares of a family have precluded all hope of preparation for the hereafter. Ask mother—when you get the chance—whether she doesn’t pray every day of her life that she may be a man next time she’s born—and it’s the same with all wives.”

“There’s no doubt about it,” said Walworth, in a tone of admiration, “that Burmese women have a lot of sense. I know no better prayer, and, mind you, I was brought up in the holy of holies of quite as good a religion as yours. I shall still hope to convince you

some day. It's late now, but shall I call on Zeta this evening about the time you're there?"

"Do! Good-bye!"

Several days had gone by since Walworth's introduction to Minkalé, and he was disappointed to find that his powers of persuasion had lost some of their potency. But the more he saw of Minkalé, the more convinced was he that she was game worth going for, and that if he could only bring her under the influence of some gay but superior spirit like Zeta's, he would yet find her pulse keeping time with his own. That they were out of step now he was inclined to attribute to Tun Min's silly meddling, but that at any rate showed that Minkalé was impressionable, and he hoped, with Zeta's co-operation, to make the right impression. Unfortunately, he was going into camp for a lesson in the "inquiry into" of crime, and would be away a few days, as it was very improbable that the dacoits would surrender without being tracked to their lairs; but he hoped on his return to prosecute his suit with vigour, and take no answer from the misguided lady but compliance with his Imperial command.

Minkalé, on the other hand, as she saw him ride home, laughed inwardly at his gawkish simplicity, and wondered whether she would have to abduct him in order to live up to the heights of her feminine ambition.

"A Burman," she said to herself, "would have carried me off in his arms or in a ticca, or, better still, in a boat, as we are so near the river. But these Englishmen have lived in colder climes, and have the power of self-control. He is a nice fellow, though—a

gaiety about him that Ko Tun Min, with his solemn face, never suggested. Still, they both have their drawbacks."

"You made a wry face then, Minkalé," said Ma May, coming into the room. "I hope it was at the mental picture of your own unladylike behaviour."

"I wasn't thinking of myself, and, curiously enough, I wasn't thinking of you, either. But it was of Ko Tun Min and Ko Walworth, and the flavour they left in my mouth was not of chocolate creams."

"Hullo! But how's that?" said Moun Ba Shin, shocked by the suggestion that the Wundauk Min was an unsweetened morsel.

"Women are no scarcer than they were in my day," said Ma May, raising her finger to suit the tone of admonition, "and unless you're a fool you won't be too fastidious. Princes are not as plentiful as pine-apples. Besides, such as there are, are either fugitives in the sunny south or prisoners in the rotting dungeons of Ratnagiri."

"I have no wish to be a princess," said Minkalé, coldly readjusting her thamlin as she turned her back on her parents and went outside to send a message to Zeta by the postman, who was just then passing.

"I think the girl's all right," said Moun Ba Shin, soothing his wife's fears. "You were just like that when you had the world at your feet, and till your eyes were opened by my wealth. Come, come! Don't shake your head as though you had the palsy!"

"Don't you tell me that my judgment was ever cloudy or wavering! My head was screwed on straight enough, and never did I cause my sweet parents any

anxiety. But then I was brought up as a Burmese girl should be."

"And Minkalé received the education that the daughter of a Burmese gentleman should get. My mother! To hear you talk like that one would think that the convent was a patent for unmaking or unhinging the girlish mind. How about Zeta?"

"When Zeta met her destiny," said Ma May, "she took it with both hands—hugged it—never dallied with it for a moment."

"No more will Minkalé. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER XI

"TELL me, Gerald," said Zeta, addressing Cruncher, who was in a communicative and amiable mood, as he had just heard of his promotion to the next grade, "what is the matter with Walworth. Sometimes I love him dearly——"

"But you must never do that!"

"And at other times he strikes me as being either mad or bad, or both."

"He is neither; but he would certainly like to be bad if he dared."

"And why doesn't he dare?" said Zeta. "It's so simple."

"He had a bad bringing up."

"That's all the more reason for being bad."

"Not with Englishmen," said Cruncher. "And I can soon show you why."

"Go on, then."

"People of his class go to Sunday-schools, where they find a conscience; then they go to Oxford, where they find it's no use."

"But how's that?"

"At Oxford he met the real saheb for the first time in his life, and saw that in the upper circles they labelled conscience a smug and a bounder. Every-

body, in fact, who could afford it had a damned good time. Mind you, there are few naughtier cities in the world than Oxford, and what Walworth saw was inspiring. It touched his imagination and made his blood gallop, but he can't quite shake off the contamination of his early associations. Every now and again he wants to be good just to set his conscience at rest."

"And when he has lulled it to sleep?"

"Then he's as sane as you and I usually are."

"I've been seeing a lot of Minkalé recently, and I think she begins to regard her future with some misgiving."

"Why?"

"Because of his moods. She never knows whether she's going to be christened or ravished, and his conversation begins to get more and more disfigured by swear words."

"Swearing," said Cruncher, "is a gentleman's birthright. Well-bred people pay no attention to it. But what of Walworth's moods?"

"Don't repeat it, but he told Minkalé that he would send her home to be polished up, and then marry her in your Church."

"She was charmed, of course."

"Only for a moment or two, for in the next breath he began to buck about the honour of his service, and the great position he held."

"Bunkum!"

"And finally would insist that Burmese girls should only be known by night. That is, when the eyes of the Government were closed in sleep."

"But you've never told me yet that Minkalé had agreed to marry him."

"Once poor Ko Tun Min's back was turned she abandoned all further pretences, and appeared as the real Minkalé; not a moment too soon, either, for he had heard from Beta that she could introduce him to Mona."

"Mona?"

"Mona of the half-blood. Her father was Colonel Sketch. She was willing to go to Walworth on his own terms—which means that she was willing to live at Tawa and be visited. But before the introduction Minkalé made a clean breast of the fraud."

"Gave Tun Min away?"

"Wholesale."

"Wasn't he annoyed?"

"With Ko Tun Min, certainly," said Zeta. "But it seemed to attract him still closer to Minkalé, for he immediately kissed her, and slipped a ring on her finger that he had carried about with him for weeks, and asked if she would go and inspect Dabein with him."

"He's a damned young rip!"

"That's what I think; and if I'm right, then the morals he affects—at times—must be put on for some wicked purpose, or he may be crazy!"

"He has no principles."

"I don't mind that, if a man has spirits, even if he got them at the bottom of a bottle of brandy; but what I do mind is the hypocrisy."

"Why?"

"Then he isn't a saheb, and no Burmese girl cares a flip of the fingers for a white man unless he is a saheb. Naturally, when he's had his fun he'll go, and he'll take with him more than he brought. Do you remember Ma Hmon's necklace? Mrs. Shotover is wearing it now."

"You're insulting Walworth, my dear. He's not that type of man at all. If he hangs back a bit, it's partly his old conscience that's to blame, and his new fears that he might botch his future; but Minkalé will do jolly well if she goes to him."

"He won't if he disappoints her."

"Men who are disappointments get on quite well in the public service."

"But not in private life," said Zeta, "when there's a wronged Burmese girl lurking in dark places. Minkalé never forgives, and Walworth, mad or sane, would rather he'd stayed at Oxford."

"But there's Mounng Tun Min waiting for Minkalé, the widow. Surely she'd be content with her first love?"

"Never!" said Zeta, with emphasis. "As your memsaheb I'm a lady, but as a myook's wife, who should I be?"

"Just the myook's wife."

"Without any delusions—without any courtesy title—without any respect. No, thank you!"

"So you regard Minkalé as a dangerous character when driven to desperation. But have Burmese girls the demon of revenge in their bosoms?"

"They keep their bosoms for love, but it's their hands and their teeth that they keep for revenge."

Surely in your nineteen years' service you've known of some interesting cases?"

"Of avarice where the victims were bejewelled babes—yes! But of revengeful women—no! I can't recall any."

"How about Ma Hline, of Payagalay, who poisoned a whole family in order to be sure of bagging her false and traitorous sweetheart?"

"Did she swing cheerfully?"

"Quite, after the Governor of the gaol had promised her her freedom when she was born again."

There is no criminal in the wide world who goes up to be hanged with quicker pulse or with better grace than the Burman, provided he is promised his pardon, and therefore his freedom, at the moment of death. Such a promise is, of course, freely given, and has apparently the effect of completely annihilating all terrors that death inspires.

"Well, you can take it from me that Minkalé will never swing for the murder of Walworth Bubbles. It is much more likely that Mounng Tun Min will drink both Walworth's blood and Minkalé's, and then take to dacoity on a large scale."

"You may break Ko Tun Min's heart, but you will never sully his hands."

"But what are you leading up to, Zeta?"

"Just this—ask Ko Walworth if his intentions are honourable. If not, then bundle him out of the district."

"It would be bad manners. But what do you regard as honourable?"

"As you and I live—openly. If that's his game

well and good. But if he's going to keep Minkalé at Tawa or at Payagyi, and just ride over for supper and chota hazri, then there'll be trouble."

"But we can't prevent it."

"I can," said Zeta, "by a little scheme of my own. In fact, I think I shall go and see Ko Tun Min; but I'll wait till things develop a bit."

Zeta meant what she said, notwithstanding the danger that, in Burmese society, such a visit would occasion far from innocent merriment.

PART II

CHAPTER I

TUN MIN was now a myook indeed, but far from the summit of his ambition. There were higher grades and more responsible offices to which he could attain, and he resolved that he would spare himself no effort in the attempt to reach the highest honours¹ then open to Burmese competition ; but he had an uneasy feeling that private conscience would require a lot of training before it consented to consort with public duty. On his arrival he had reported himself to Spicer, the distinguished Deputy Commissioner, and had received the usual formula with which the latter officer exhorted griffins sent to him for training.

“ You will,” Spicer had said coldly, while Tun Min squatted on a mat at the door of the former’s study, “ if you desire to rise and shine, regard every prisoner as a criminal ripe for conviction and sentence, every pleader as vermin demanding extinction, every policeman as an Imperial bulwark, every Deputy Commissioner as a god, and your own as the mightiest in the Imperial hierarchy. You will be offered bribes. Don’t shake your head. Bribery is the most ancient of all Burmese customs, and the most damnable. If you’re caught—and you’re sure to be in my district—it’s certain death. Be clean in mind and body—and begone !”

Tun Min remembered every word of the exhortation, and not a day had passed but he had been able on going to bed to say with equal truth and satisfaction that his Deputy Commissioner's precepts had been obeyed. Indeed, litigants were amazed, and the profession annoyed, for such probity was without a precedent. But it was the pleader in particular who was most unhappy.

As known to the Alompras, the lawyer was a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends—a patchwork of stained morals, of low cunning that did duty for business capacity, and of soiled rags of experience in the shady walks of life. He was expected to lie with fluency and fortitude, and never did he send a client away disappointed. But of legal knowledge he was innocent, and was forgiven. There was, indeed, law, but, being customary, it was fluid, which in the language of commerce means that it was bought and sold. Such, said tradition, was the law and its prophet from years so remote that they exceed in number the drops of rain that fell in a dozen seasons. Now, when the horn of Eastern tradition is exalted, it is to the accompaniment of barbaric music and boastful challenge, and the Alompran tradition was no exception to the rule. “We alone live in the light!” shouted the Shanays* of Arracan. “And the Kala Kwes are children of darkness!” But just about that time John Company had been living in the purest of lights, and was intensely annoyed at the taunt of the farthing dip in the pineapple jungle, and out went the whole Burmese constellation of Shanays, great and small.

* Pleaders.

But the Burman would not be comforted with the barristers and solicitors of the West. These had an impossible moral standard, spoke a harsh and incomprehensible language, and derived their inspiration from musty books instead of from glittering gold-mohurs. He would have none of the new legal system, and it was a critical moment for Imperialism in the pineapple jungle. But the little band of statesmen who sat at Lord Amherst's round table in Calcutta were equal to any emergency, and at an inspired moment the pleader of Bengal was engrafted on the still delicate and anæmic plant of Burmese justice. Few would have supposed it, but the actual genesis of the "goosal-khana" lawyer, as he was christened for the perfume of his moral and spiritual nature, lay in the desire to conciliate Burmese national feeling, and compensate it for the extinction of its own juridical school.

The pleader himself made no mistake as to his origin. He felt he was a brilliant invention, and that he had to live up to it, or, in other words, that invention should be equally the label of his origin and the purpose of his life. His success was not only phenomenal, but it was dangerous, and in those days there was hardly a Deputy Commissioner but he rose from his bed in the morning with a fixed determination to exterminate the brood. That, however, was found to be impossible, for the pleader had burrowed deep in the myook's bosom, and no Imperial operation could extract him. To have abolished the myook was to have uprooted national life, so the pleader was allowed to live. He did live, and he grew, and

he flourished till Tun Min was incontinently posted to Shwegyn. That was a blow under which the pleader reeled, but he pulled himself together with the highly popular stimulant of "pen-and-ink," and thereafter Spicer's daily post-bag was filled with anonymous but libellous reflections on the myook's integrity.

"That," said Spicer to himself in the solitude of his study, "is a good sign. Tun Min is sweeping clean. We shall enlarge his powers, and make him a first-class magistrate. In this sink of corruption no one is blamed for feathering his nest, unless he does it nervously and in retail. If Tun Min's accused, it's because he's honest."

Convinced of Tun Mun's purity, Spicer immediately increased the burden of the myook's work, much to the mortification of the legal profession ; but Tun Min himself was far from gratified, except in the knowledge that he was appreciated by a rising and influential officer. He had expected the appreciation to be marked by promotion, by improved social intercourse with the European element, and by the increased respect of all the lower official strata for a capable magistrate. But gazettes did not mention him ; Spicer never noticed his salutes, and in the living world of fraud and falsehood he was regarded as dead to the dictates of intelligence and self-interest alike, and men and women smiled when they shikoeed to him on the road.

"This is intolerable," he reflected. "And Minkalé has repeatedly promised that my career would soon mature. She sees the Wundauk every day, and has his assurance that my name has been brought to the

notice of the Kinwoon Mingyi—but still nothing comes of it.”

He was both puzzled and mortified, and was for telegraphing immediately to stimulate Minkalé's zeal, when his only friend Subramunyan Chetty called to warn him that he was in danger, as the legal profession, disappointed at his honesty, had conspired to destroy him.

“Were it only the pleader,” said the Chetty, rubbing his large round naked stomach with a greasy hand, “you could deal with him single-handed, and nobody would blame you. But the policeman with the base ingratitude of his nature has also turned against you—and he controls many engines of destruction.”

“Why?” asked Tun Min coldly.

“It was this way,” said the Chetty in a whisper. “When you came you fluttered a co-operative judgment society. Please wait and I'll explain. Your predecessor could not bear the sight of the Penal Code, but he was not a fool.”

“How was that?”

“Sitting on his rickety dealwood perch, the lone man saw nothing in the Penal Code but an unkindly epitome of his own past life—pleasant if you like, and successful too, but in the legal light his life had a crimson hue. He made a rapid mental calculation, and when it suggested a future of ages and ages in an Imperial prison, he flung the obnoxious volume out of the nearest window—it was an unclean and dangerous thing.”

“Then what did he administer?”

“A patent of his own,” said the Chetty, drawing even nearer as his whispers got softer. “He found

that the policeman was a discoverer of fact, while the pleader was a past professor of law. What was more natural? They prepared his judgments—but he alone signed them.”

“Impossible! Their interests are hostile.”

“Give me time. The cases were numbered, and in those that were odd the prisoner was doomed, but in those that were even he was permitted again to abuse his liberty. Now, as a moneylender, I can assure your honour that fifty per cent. will satisfy not only the hungry heart of man, but the large-mouthed official doctrine of averages.”

“I expect there was some competition to be on the even list.”

“It was a brilliant idea. It commercialized criminal justice. Men and women could buy it in the bazaar and nobody complained—least of all the myook, the pleader, and the policeman who either bought old houses or built new ones.”

“So that was the dove-cote I fluttered. But what a curious thing that the public for whom justice was carefully elaborated, should despise it and prefer the other thing.”

“Thinking like a monk, and feeling like a man,” said the Chetty in his natural voice, now that he was merely philosophizing, “are two very different things. British justice suits my book very well, but I’m in a small minority. To the criminally disposed world it means that rich and poor are bracketed. That money is sterilized. That a man who can pay for what he wants mustn’t have his wants satisfied. The thing in the East is ludicrous. Paralyze the Burman’s leg

and he will never complain, but not his gold. What your honour administers has the scent of roses to my nostrils, but the stink of rotten meat to the Babu and the Burman."

"I shall never change," said Tun Min. "The rain of falsehood and calumny can beat their hardest on my character, but the tempest will pass, and I shall be left unhurt to rise and shine."

"But your honour is unbathed."

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Tun Min in a tone of indignation, failing to recognize in the Chetty's speech his own fondness for metaphor.

"The Hindu," said the Chetty, drawing his legs under him as he squatted on the floor, "bathes in the Ganges and is forgiven."

"I am not a Hindu, and will never bathe in the Ganges."

"You have not caught my meaning. East and West don't often agree, but they both regard the bath with reverence. The Hindu's next existence is purified by an immersion in the Ganges, but his present life is honoured according as whether or not he has bathed in the river of London."

"Physically?"

"No. He must have graduated in its schools."

"But what does that mean?"

"That he has thrown off one civilization without acquiring another—he goes braced by the tenets of Hinduism."

"And returns?"

"Addicted to brandy and brown boots, having left a bastard baby or two behind."

"Oh, it's quits then! The Indian lives the same life in London as the Englishman does in Burma. But, Chetty saheb, there's a flaw somewhere in that argument. You are applying to the Burman a rule that the Government only reserves for Hindus and Mohammedans—we are sturdier stuff, and they recognize our superiority."

"Hindu, or Buddhist, or Mohammedan," said the Chetty, "it is the same thing. We are all black, and the Imperial prescription is administered full strength, whether we hail from Trichinopoly, or Madura, or from Mandalay."

"You damp my ardour," said Tun Min, beginning to feel that the cakes and ale of office looked less satisfying than they had promised.

"Your honour has been very good to me," said the Chetty, "and I thought I could prevent disappointment from embittering your cup before it was too late."

"Then what do you advise?"

"A lower seat."

"In the contaminating circle of pleaders and policemen? Thank you—no. You mean well, and I shall try not to be annoyed. But what of the conspiracy? In whose fertile brain has the plot been hatching that is to annihilate me?"

"You will have to walk very warily, and to take the Deputy Commissioner into your confidence. He will give you his help ungrudgingly. There is no more loyal friend to a faithful servant than the Civil Service man. He will be your shield, and with his sword shall your enemies be smitten."

"Go on with the story."

"They haven't the brain for anything deep, but still the plot is deep enough. You take dying declarations in the dilapidated hospital?"

"I do."

"You will be called out to-night for that purpose—there may be a real case, or it may be a false alarm. You must go, and while you are away, your enemies will enter your house—there is room under your bed for a strangled baby."

"Ma Lé!"

"Or in your cupboard for opium, or in your clothes for stolen currency notes, or in your closet for arms and ammunition."

Tun Min shuddered and was speechless for many moments.

"Go and see Spicer saheb, and he will comfort you. He doesn't talk much, but when he takes to hunting down a budmash, he comes back with the scalp all right."

"Shall I mention you?"

"That would be a mistake, for it would put you to confusion. He would send for me, and my memory has one curious feature—that in the presence of a Deputy Commissioner it is invariably a blank. Say you heard it in the bazaar, and that your informer bolted—he'll swallow it."

When the Chetty had gone, the myook was in great distress, and wished he had never left the kyoung, but he looked to Spicer for protection, and immediately made for the latter's house.

"I wanted to see you," said Spicer as Tun Min

crawled into his presence. "So your enemies want to break you."

"Yes, my lord."

"Who told you?"

"I heard a bazaar rumour."

"That," said Spicer, slowly and emphatically, "is a damned lie! But it's only natural you should wish to screen the informer. Never mind that. I know all I want to. Now listen to me, and if you miss a word, you'll be dead before morning. Send your boy away without exciting his suspicion. Send him to Pegu with a chit to your father. He's your only servant?"

"Yes."

"The Yazo Woon and I will come to your house disguised as monks some time after dark. You will ignore us. Don't look out for us as if you were expecting somebody. Possibly we may be concealed in your compound, which I know by heart. When called out go, leaving the house open just as it always is, with the lamp only just turned down. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Go!"

Tun Min returned to his bungalow with slower steps, and far less agitated as Spicer's manner had inspired confidence; and when he got home, awaited the issue of the closing day calmly gathering his scattered papers, and in tidying up his sparsely-furnished house before his guests arrived.

"I never thought it possible," he reflected, "that an honourable man doing his duty could become a

target for the musketry of the world he is set over ; but here it is."

Tun Min's experience did not include the higher walks of life, or a knowledge of Western ways, or he would have known that the malignant whispers of club life accomplish much more safely and successfully what his local enemies were boldly trying to achieve by less ingenious methods.

CHAPTER II

SHWEGYN was then, and is now, an old and decrepit town, whose former glory has faded, and whose normal appearance is that of deep and well-deserved slumber. It had been explored for gold in the past, and was in its outlying fields sown for paddy in the present ; but there was a blight on its destiny, for there were neither roads nor railroads, and the river for much the greater part of the year lay a long way off as a shrunken and shallow stream, useless alike for either business or pleasure. But though languishing commercially, it had jealously preserved its criminal character, and, indeed, accentuated it by the importation of pleaders and police from the highly-trained schools of Bengal and the Punjaub. Hardly a morning dawned, but there came a report from one or more of the scattered villages of some ghastly tragedy in which the Burman's brutality was equalled only by his contempt for human life, or by his genius for plunder. The Chief Commissioner at Rangoon howled, and practised sundry other Imperial arts that had been known to succeed on the banks of the Nerbudda, but the Sittang was another river altogether unhampered by religious associations, and unaccustomed to the control of alien forces. The Deputy Com-

missioner, and the District Superintendent of Police, who is known as the Yazo Woon, were held up to public obloquy, but crime continued to flourish, and both pleader and native policeman batted on it till Tun Min's advent and the assumption by him of a higher jurisdiction than that usually vested in the budding magistrate.

"We shall simply eat him up," said Bungoo the pleader, whose recent want of success in the courts had depleted pockets long used to being full.

"We shall make him a warning to his fraternity for all time," said Hiram Sing, the Police Prosecutor.

"Everything, my brother," said Bungoo, beginning to undress, "is ready. Do you go and dine, for why should nature wait?"

"I never dine when I have a dirty job on hand," said Hiram Sing, "till it is finished. But you Bengalis do nothing on an empty stomach, unless it is accounts or finance. Take your time, but don't gorge, or you'll be as torpid as a python; but a little brandy-and-water won't do you any harm."

"That would be a sin against my god and against yours also, so why suggest pollution on the threshold of a dangerous enterprise? I am superstitious."

"Bother you and your long words."

Hiram Sing left after promising to be back at ten; but as if to reconnoitre the myook's position, he took the road past the latter's house on his way to the police station. There was nothing he thought to excite his suspicion. He did, when a long way off, see two monks in their yellow robes slouch lazily in at the

gate, but that was nothing unusual for MOUNG TUN MIN, with his professed monkish tastes.

The time wore on, and TUN MIN, who lay excited and expectant in his narrow bed, was, as he had been warned, called up by a messenger to visit a desperate case in the hospital, and record, if possible, the dying statement of a patient as to his injuries. He hastily dressed and left the house, after turning down the light that burned in his tiny front veranda, but no sooner was he gone than did the conspirators BUNGOO and HIRNAM SING emerge stealthily from a deep ditch from which laterite had been quarried, and crawl on all fours into the veranda, where they took a hasty look all round, and feeling they were unobserved, crept into the dining-room, and thence up the stairs to the MYOOK'S bedroom. Here his coats hung from nails driven into the timber walls, but after consultation, the intruders agreed upon the drawers of the toilet table as the likeliest place for concealing the incriminatory currency-notes.

"Kali be praised!" said BUNGOO. "The myook's blood will have the sweet savour and warmth of youth. Now let the whole hierarchy of magistrates and policemen appear and find the stolen notes. Their cherished delusions as to the boy myook's foolish integrity will vanish like thin air."

"Your courage is better than your English," said HIRNAM SING; "but let the D.C. come by all means, and the YAZO WOON too—the feast is ready——"

"We have come," said SPICER, with electric effect.

SPICER, and MORTLOCK the YAZO WOON, had, after

much doubt and discussion, selected some low clumps of bamboos for their concealment. These were situated quite near the ditch that was afterwards occupied by the conspirators, and for a moment or two the detectives experienced the most excruciating anxiety, for it was almost within arm's length of them that the would-be destroyers of Tun Min passed on their noiseless way to an insanitary but well-chosen place from where they could see without being seen.

Neither Spicer nor Mortlock spoke, nor did they dare to scratch their mosquito bites with their quarry in such dangerous proximity, but their blood was aglow with the joys of the chase, and willingly would they have watched another hour; only, much to their disappointment, Bungoo was in haste to be done with a dangerous job, and actually gave the policeman a lead in the latter's game.

From where they lay, Spicer commanded a perfect view of both the veranda and the dining-room, just sufficiently lit for him to distinguish the figures creeping upstairs. That was the moment he tapped Mortlock on the shoulder, and both men walked quietly but quickly in, and noiselessly bolted the door behind them. As they ascended the stairs, they feared their presence would be made known by the creaking of old and badly joined timber, but the confederates were too deeply interested in encompassing the myook's ruin to be alarmed by the usual noises that are heard in wooden houses where the tuctoo, the bat, the lizard, and the beetle are tenants in perpetuity.

"We have come," said Spicer, and he looked at the trembling and gibbering Babu pleader with mingled amusement and satisfaction, much as a cat does a captive mouse; but before Mortlock could address himself to Hirnam Sing, the latter, with his athletic build and Afridi instinct for escape, was out of the window and away safe, at any rate for a day or two.

"O my god, my lord!" whimpered the Babu. "I have burnt my behind."

"What do you mean?" said Spicer, taking him literally and turning him round to improve the view.

"That's the Babu's indelicate way," said Mortlock, laughing, "for saying he'd burnt his boats, or that his retreat was cut off."

"Now then," said Spicer, in his usual tone, "tell me exactly what you've done and why."

"I, my lord," said the Babu, kneeling on both knees, "have done nothing. It was that base Punjaubi policeman who coerced and abducted me. It is he that has put this shame upon me."

"Let's lock him up for the night," said Mortlock, "and I dare say by morning the station atmosphere will have induced repentance."

That, Mortlock knew, was a primitive but highly efficient means of discovering important secrets. Not that torture was employed, but the blandishments of the guard-writer had the effect of stimulating a desire to confess in the hope that the penitent would be lightly punished.

"I apply for bail, my lord," said the Babu, per-

spiring copiously at the thought of the guard-writer's soothing attentions.

"We don't give bail after dark," said Spicer coldly. "Besides, yours is a bit of non-bailable black-guardism. Put your head out, Mortlock, and blow your whistle."

The Yazo Woon did as he was told, and on the appearance of a constable, the Babu was given in charge, while Spicer diligently searched both clothes and furniture, till he happened on the secreted stolen notes which were intended to be the myook's ruin. Tun Min, who just then returned, was told uncereemoniously that he would hear more about it in the morning, but was meanwhile left to infer from the disorder of his room and from the custody of the pleader that a crime had both been committed and detected in his house. Spicer and Mortlock returned to a belated dinner after seeing Bungoo placed under lock and key.

"It worked out very simply," said Mortlock, going into dinner after finishing a pint of beer that he had badly needed.

"My informer was a woman," said Spicer, beginning to attack his soup with a spoon held threateningly over it, "and no man will ever approach her, not only in the art of communicating what's true, but in the higher art of making you believe what she says."

"Who is she?"

"Zeta. Cruncher's latest addition to his Imperial family. But she's on furlo', and being a Kyaikto girl looked me up in token of an old friendship."

"But how should she know?"

"She's from Pegu, and all Pegu's interested in Tun Min, so she thought she'd find out how he was getting on. The best index is the Chetty's ledger. Zeta has two brothers, and she knows all right. So she went and saw Subramunyan Chetty, with whom she has her own little account, and was amazed to hear that Tun Min had saved nothing."

"He's really straight."

"Yes. That terrified Zeta, for she knows there's no more unpopular man than an honest Burman, and worming her way into the Chetty's confidences she quickly learned of this little plot."

"Then the Chetty's in the soup, too?"

"Not Subramunyan, but Vyraven. The latter apparently does a large business in stolen notes, and it struck the ingenious pleader that if he could stow away a few of those on the Comptroller's black list in Tun Min's house there would, on information, be a search and discovery, followed by the myook's ruin. The plan is well conceived."

"In part."

"Vyraven got it in confidence what he meant to do with the notes—from the pleader—and Chetty-like communicated his secret to Subramunyan, giving him at the same time the numbers, lest the Babu might try and pass the notes off on him."

"Subramunyan thought he'd save the myook."

"And grind his own little axe as well."

"How?"

"It's the end of Vyraven, and he'll now be without a rival."

They sat over their pipes after dinner till the small hours, recalling case after case which, by the exercise of their analytical skill, had been shown to be false, and still thanked God it was Burma and not Bengal, for they both remembered the historic case in which, with diabolical ingenuity, a Hindu had committed suicide under such circumstances that his enemy might be charged with his murder.

While his superiors made merry over their reminiscences, Tun Min was passing the hours weeping and wondering whether he would ever be happy and contented again. His father rarely wrote, and Min-kalé's letters had no longer the warm sentiment with which the correspondence had opened when he first left Pegu. But what had struck deeper down than anything else into his young and tender heart was what he regarded as Spicer's outrageous demeanour to his Burmese subordinates.

"He turns my house topsy-turvy, and leaves without a word of explanation," he reflected, "flinging me a prophecy that I should hear more in the morning. We Burmans are just morally and spiritually spat on—if in the Government service. Why should we be treated as dirt?"

Tun Min's complaint was reasonably and fully justified by the brutal mannerisms of his Deputy Commissioner, who had no regard for anybody's feelings but his own. But with Spicer the fault was only superficial, for in common with all his colleagues he had the country's interests at heart, and wherever he went the good name of England shone brightly. His Chief had remonstrated with him for his un-

diplomatic methods and rugged tones, but without success.

“Eton,” said Spicer, “may have won the Empire on its playing fields, but, by God! it’s ruled by the sixth form from Cheltenham. It’s we that keep the Empire!”

CHAPTER III

The following day the only ticca gharry in Shwegyn drove up to Tun Min's door, and, much to his surprise, Zeta immediately jumped out and held his hand before he had time to say "Ma Lé!" which really means "My mother!" but is the Burmese equivalent for "My God!" It was a bold step for Zeta to have taken, and one that was certain to occasion a lively controversy in her own circle when it came to be known, but for scandal and gossip and fault-finding she cared not a snap of the fingers, and, having made up her mind to do Tun Min a service, she did it without thinking of the consequences to herself.

"You're still alive, I see," she said, taking a chair that was one of three or four ugly specimens of locally made furniture in a practically unfurnished room.

"Oh! How did you come to hear of it?"

"A myook is such a distinguished man," said Zeta, smiling and looking her sweetest, "that even when he sneezes or spits they put it in the papers."

"I wonder how many there were in the plot, and why they should all have conspired against me."

"I had a long talk," said Zeta, preparing to tell a story, "with the Yazo Woon this morning, and he

was delighted to have the Babu's partial confession in the ruffian's own handwriting. Tell me, who do you think the hospital messenger was? and you actually failed to recognize him."

"It was dark."

"He was your own Bench clerk. When your character was established his private income ceased, and it was he, according to the Babu, that was the arch plotter."

"No doubt the Babu pretends that he played quite a subordinate part."

"That Babu," said Zeta, playing with her lovely gold bangles, "is a champion liar and a worthy son of Bengal. How do you think he explains his presence in your house? Don't smile. I swear it's true. He declares that his sole intention was to protect and befriend you. In the pathetic little story he has written for the entertainment of the Sessions Judge he says his only thought was to circumvent the plotters, and that he could think of none better than to be an eyewitness of their infamy here and a crown witness of it there in the Sessions Court. But I shall be a witness, too."

"You?"

"Oh yes. You wouldn't think that I was an amateur detective, would you? But, Ko Tun Min, it was Zeta's blundering mind that stumbled on the whole diabolical plot, and now she's going to make a little fortune out of it."

"You are not."

"There's nothing wrong in it in our code, nor in the myook's. You see, it was Vyraven Chetty that pro-

vided the stolen notes, and Subramunyan Chetty that told me of their little game. If Subramunyan will only give me a lovely three-string pearl necklace that he has acquired by unfair means, then it will be my pleasant duty to suggest that I was his emissary, that it was he who sent me to Spicer with the Babu's plans unfolded. If he doesn't, he will go to the Andamans with the rest of them."

"I'm shocked! So it was you that told Spicer?"

"You'll be much more shocked when I tell you the Pegu news, and, my friend, that's what I'm really here for."

"I hope Captain Cruncher hasn't gone home ill," said Tun Min nervously.

"He's nursing one of his first loves," said Zeta quite calmly, "and I wish her joy of him with his drunken habits. Ugh! No. I wasn't thinking of him. It was of you and Minkalé and Ko Walworth, and really I've been greatly distressed——"

"You needn't worry about Minkalé," said Tun Min. "I thought she'd let you into our wild scheme, and that you could see she was only fooling the Wundauk Min, in the hope that he might study and promote my interests."

"That was the beginning, and a very worthy beginning. But there's often a perversity about beginnings—their endings are quite another and uglier family."

"Surely nothing terrible has happened? I should have heard of it—there is Ko Mounng and the Sayadaw, who still takes an interest in me, and from whom I have had the most encouraging letters. Then there's

the bazaar-goung, and little of interest escapes him though he wears tinted glasses and walks with a drooping head."

"They've got him in gaol all right, and you won't hear from him just yet. But, tell me, do you often hear from Minkalé?"

"Two or three times a week."

"Does she tell you of Ko Walworth's visits?"

"Every time. She conceals nothing. His manner to her is most caressing, sometimes most embarrassing; but the dear girl puts up with it all, as it's to benefit me. He's promised her that my name is before the Kinwoon Mingyi, and that I shall soon be a Wundauk Min myself—but I admit it's been a bit slow in coming. In fact, at times I feel greatly depressed, and wish Minkalé could put a little 'juldý' * into it."

Zeta watched his features most intently as he spoke, and wondered whether he was also acting a part or whether he really believed the nonsense Minkalé had heartlessly stuffed him up with.

"I shouldn't look for immediate promotion if I were you—though, of course, it will come. But tell me when you are to be married?"

"I suggested the late spring, when the paths are golden with padouk and when the air is laden with scent, but she thought it was premature."

"Minkalé didn't say she was too young to marry?" asked Zeta acidly.

"I see you're *not* in the plot. Let me enlighten you. Walworth, the moment he saw Minkalé, wanted to marry her out of hand, but the dear girl was per-

* Quickness.

fectly loyal to me. It, however, occurred to us that with a little skill we could use the Wundauk as a lever to raise me to this and even more exalted offices. Walworth was told that Minkalé was not for love—why? Because I was the great force propelling her towards monasticism. Obviously it was necessary to get me out of the way. A criminal would have been deported under some musty old regulation, but an obstruction on a Wundauk's matrimonial path is lifted into an Imperial siding."

"Where you'll be left."

"Why?"

"You've ceased to be an obstruction. Surely that must have occurred to you! You have nothing more to hope for."

"Oh, but Minkalé is believed to be still an adherent to my doctrines."

"That notion was exploded almost the day you left."

"Who by?"

"By Minkalé, of course. Who else? You don't like to hear it, but it's the solid truth. And I'm just going to tell you the whole thing. You began by being an obstruction, as you call it, in the Wundauk's way, but you ended by being an equally big obstruction in Minkalé's way. Did that occur to you?"

"I can't sit here and listen——"

"You shall! You only have to exercise the great intellect concealed, and apparently asleep in your little head, to know that Zeta is not talking nonsense. Tell me, have women no ambition?"

"The most sacred: To be enshrined in the hearts of husbands and children."

"Do come off that saintly pedestal! Open the windows of your mind. I put it to you straight—which do you think Minkalé would rather be, a myook's wife or a Deputy Commissioner's mistress? He isn't a D.C. yet, but he will be shortly, and you'll be a myook for ever."

Tun Min was deeply moved by Zeta's sacrilegious talk, and looked at the ticca gharry much as to suggest that it was desirable to close the interview; but Zeta was a wilful woman, and now that she was wound up simply had to wind out in the only natural way.

"Don't look at the gharry. I'm not half done. The fable that Minkalé was enamoured of nunnery under your monkish guidance was exposed by Minkalé herself, in a moment of confidence, when Ko Walworth was beginning to think her impregnable."

"What authority have you for a libel like that? I warn you, Zeta, that Minkalé will have you up for that."

"My authority is as high as heaven. It is Ko Walworth himself."

"Never!"

"Give me a 'kyanza' and I'll swear it now. He came in one morning, shaking with laughter and making a hideous noise. Captain Cruncher was annoyed at first, but after a bit he laughed the louder of the two. Now, you know it's bad manners in a D.C. to laugh, and I guessed something was very much amiss. I had guessed right, and what do you think it was?"

"What?"

"Walworth, chewing the end of a cigar, said: 'It was all a damned trap. I fell into it headlong. All

Pegu laughed when they saw Mounng Tun Min go off to Shwegyn as a myook, and now they've got us in a pwe. Tun Min's represented as running off with my gown and bands, while I've bolted with his girl.' "

" Ko Walworth was tight," said Tun Min, declining to believe a word against his sweetheart.

" You do him an injustice," said Zeta quickly. " He takes very little, and in his amusing way explains that what's made a practical teetotaller of him was his Commissioner's whisky—his head still aches at the recollection of it."

" And his tongue?"

" You know the symptoms quite well. To go on—I was lugged into their merry circle."

" And you thoroughly enjoyed the ribald references to Minkalé and myself."

" I confess I was amused—who isn't by Ko Walworth's spirits? But left to think it all out alone, it occurred to me that you at any rate ought to be told, and there was nobody but me to tell you."

" But the Wundauk Min harbours no ill-will. He told Minkalé that my name had gone in for promotion."

" That is fiction undilute."

" He lied to Minkalé?"

" Minkalé lied to you," said Zeta, now fully wound up. " I've spoken to her about the disgraceful business, and while she professes to be very sorry for you she says frankly enough that her first duty is to herself—and she is comforted by the thought that Burma is rich in feminine beauty."

"You dare say that Minkalé suggested that I should take another comforter?"

Moung Tun Min was now greatly agitated, and, Burman-like, was for immediately taking an ample revenge, but the distance between Pegu and Shwegyn was sufficiently great to give his heated blood time to cool. Zeta, however, was near, and, much to the young lady's astonishment, she unpleasantly discovered that she had roused a sleeping lion who had no more respect for her sex or for her feelings than if she had been an unclean pariah dog. But Zeta was also a Burman, and as the contest was colloquial, she was equipped by Nature to hold her own.

"I once pitied you," said Tun Min in a paroxysm of wrath, "but now I loathe you, and unless you get out of my sight at once you'll be pitched out!"

"I shall not go till I want," said Zeta, blazing up in an instant, "and no one shall pitch me out. I came here to tell you the truth, and that means the whole truth. You shall hear it, so don't put your hands up to your silly little ears. I came here to tell you——"

"A lie!" said Tun Min, standing up and tightening his putsoe.

"To tell you that Minkalé will be 'Mrs.' Bubbles the day after to-morrow!"

"Ma Lé!"

"It is true, and, if you doubt me, read that!" she said, tossing him a letter she had just received from Cruncher, who had agreed to take the part of one of Walworth's elders or trustees of the settlement that is usually made at a Burmese wedding—that is to say,

wedding in the purely Burmese sense; but when the solemnization is between an Englishman and a Burmese woman it is not by English law a valid marriage.

Moung Tun Min literally fell upon the letter and devoured it, and when he came to the words, "I'm devilish sorry for Moung Tun Min, who will be heart-broken," he wept. Zeta was likewise stirred at the sight of the myook's tears, but she was older and had greater self-control.

"My brother," she said, with infinite tenderness in her tone, "forget Minkalé."

"I shall never give her up without a struggle," sobbed Tun Min. "She's a mere child whose head has been turned by the solicitations of a man of rank. The fact of it is, you know, it's all your malign influence——"

"You're mad! I never influenced her!"

"I meant your example. She saw you receive the adoration of a queen, and that upset her judgment. But when I've talked with her, she'll admit her mistake. You didn't say her parents had sent out 'let-pet' to their friends."

It is an old Burmese custom to distribute tea, or let-pet, as the leaves are called, as an invitation to a wedding, but its origin is completely shrouded in obscurity.

"No; the preparations have been the most secret. When the water festival was on, Ko Moung saw Walworth Bubbles sprinkle Minkalé till her clothes simply clung to her; but he only thought it a lark, and has never guessed that there was anything on."

"And here have I been living in a fool's paradise!

I did hear, though, that for the full moon of Taboung he had accompanied Ko Ba Shin's family to the Shwe Dagon; but I thought nothing of that, as Ko Walworth would like to see Rangoon. Anyhow, Ma Zeta, I recall everything I said when I was raving, and am grateful for the timely warning. I shall get a few days' leave——"

"Go now and ask for them. Believe me, you have not a moment to lose."

Moung Tun Min saw Zeta to her gharry, where she wished him good luck; but she left with a heavy heart, and on her way home wept for Moung Tun Min's cruel fate.

"He," she reflected, "is one of those few men who never recover from a disappointment. It simply eats up their hearts in a night, and after that it sits down to chew their minds slowly but certainly, till they go raving mad. Now, if Cruncher were to hear that I had run off with Treble Bloo, he'd merely sing out for Loo Tyouk, and send him out to reconnoitre the world of beauty. His pulse would beat neither faster nor slower. These Englishmen are nice fellows to live with, but they haven't much heart—unless it's the heart of a rabbit."

CHAPTER IV

TUN MIN'S request for leave was curtly granted, and, without making any preparations for the journey, he immediately crossed the river in a country boat to an orchard, where a bullock-cart for Pyuntaza was generally available. But he was out of luck, and there was nothing before him but a dreary tramp through baked paddy-fields at a time when even the Burman seeks shelter from the scorching rays of a midday sun. But neither the temperature of the sun nor the rough-and-tumble of the road made the least impression upon him. He was solving a problem in which the known and unknown quantities were disproportionately mixed, and, moreover, it was a problem in practical biology. Not the biology of the schools, where the path of the earnest worker is lit with the lamps of recent discovery, but the biology of Anglo-Burman Imperialism, in which the destiny of a Burmese man was apparently determined by the lust of an Englishman for a Burmese woman.

"What Imperialism means for me," he reflected, "is a bamboo mat at the threshold of the D.C.'s office; but what it means for Minkalé and Zeta and the flower of Burmese womanhood is a bed in the D.C.'s bungalow!"

Sometimes he stifled his thoughts, and at others he spoke aloud; but with every step he took the prospect of improving his relations with Minkalé and Bubbles seemed to grow darker and darker. Once he wished he had not been told of the approaching tragedy till it was all over, and was annoyed with Zeta, whose interference, however, now turned the current of his thoughts from one problem to another.

"What made her chip in?" he asked. "It was no business of hers."

And then he laughed a hoarse laugh, as he thought his penetrating mind had guessed her selfish plans.

"I know it," he said, loud enough to be heard. "Zeta is in love with Walworth herself, but he prefers Minkalé. Not that he would disappoint Zeta by sending her away, but she would have a smaller corner of his muddy mind and heart. So that is her game! I'm to reclaim Minkalé in order that hungry and thirsty Walworth might be content to soothe his animal wants with Zeta!"

But after a little reflection he thought his conclusion was a gross injustice to the girl's character, as he had known it since a child, and he abandoned the theory, for what was beyond doubt the true explanation, which was no other than that Zeta was sufficiently fond of him to wish him to be happy.

"She was always a good friend," he decided, "and was really revolted by the flirtation carried on under her very nose; and now that it has culminated in a base and treacherous renunciation of me, the poor girl is both shocked and grieved for my sake. Still, I must see for myself. I must hear it with my own ears and

from Minkalé herself that she has abandoned me. If she has, then may the missionary's hills and mountains fall upon me and bury me with my sorrow and humiliation."

Taking the train at Pyuntaza, the weary and foot-sore myook was soon at Pegu, and once more in the home he had so recently left. Not a stick of furniture had been changed in his absence. They were all there—the rude chairs and dust-covered tables, the gaudy chromo-lithographs, and even the goblet of water with a dirty rag tied at the mouth to act as a strainer—but Tun Min felt very far from being at home in the familiar surroundings.

"I expected my son," said Ko MOUNG, embracing him, and speaking in a tremulous tone.

"Then you knew of the woman's treachery?"

"I foretold it. They did their best to conceal the coming nuptials, but Ko MOUNG, asleep or awake, keeps his finger on the pulse of Pegu. The goldsmith told me in detail of the Wundauk's orders. They are on a sumptuous scale."

"But why did you not tell me before it was too late?"

"Because I saw in the light of age and experience——"

"What was it you saw?" asked Tun Min, almost in a white passion with his philosophical father.

"That marriage was a deep subject. You can both swim and drown in its waters—the latter is the easier of the two. You marry Minkalé, and you both drown. Ko Walworth will hold the pair of you down till you are both dead. But if she goes to him, then you can

all swim. In her moments of remorse Minkalé will try to sweeten your disappointed life, and as she has the Wundauk under her thumb, you and they can all rise and shine."

"Then Ko MOUNG puts worldly success above domestic happiness," said Tun Min scornfully.

"I always put the cause before the effect."

"I call that a soulless doctrine," said Tun Min contemptuously.

"It is the only key to domestic happiness. You prosper, and your wife is steeped in happiness. You fail, and if her youth and beauty have lost little of their freshness, she readjusts her married life. I know a General who lost a battle—well, his wife now is the spouse of a successful civilian. You boys grow up in the pernicious idea that love and affection sail the sea of life without either rudder or compass. There are men and women who do. Adventurers there must be, but they are sooner or later wrecked—and it must be so."

"Did mother really love you?"

"She adored me, and though it's I as says it, it was in all the circumstances a very natural sentiment. Do you think there was a man between Mogoung and Meiktila who was more respected by the minions of the King or more feared by the thief and the robber? And as for the ladies—I had only to wink, and they followed me like lambs."

"We have different standards now."

"Standards vary a good deal in theory," said Ko MOUNG, taking a long pull at a plantain-leaf-bound cigar, "but not in practice. Human nature is the

same contemptible thing, whether it's rolled in a black or a white skin. On a Pagoda day you recite a precept—the recital costs you nothing—but on your way home you meet an enemy and slay him—it costs you a lot. But which gives you the greater pleasure? Standards, indeed! How about the Wundauk's standards? And isn't he the latest importation? the latest fashion in Imperial measure? Don't smile. It was you who suggested the beacon of standards; Ko Walworth and I, who were brought up the poles asunder, prefer the lamp of common-sense."

"What does that mean?" asked Tun Min, now a little calmer, as he followed his father's preaching, though by no means disposed to abandon Minkalé to Walworth without an effort, even if it should blast his own future.

"His principles and mine are as limpid as filtered water. We have a shrewd idea as to what is good for us and what isn't. We take the former with both hands, the others we jettison—it may be with emotion, but a tear or two matters little. Ko Walworth thinks, and thinks rightly, that Minkalé can do him no harm. In a strange land he wants some soothing syrup, and with Minkalé he will get an inexhaustible supply of the most tasty type. Do you think he's going to rummage about in the corners of his mind for a conscience to spank him for stealing your bottle? Not he!"

"And with all your philosophy," said Tun Min smilingly, "you have remained Ko MOUNG of Pegu, living and dying in a timber hut, squatting on bamboo mats, walking barefooted, shikoing even to a constable

min. I own I have a little more ambition than that."

"Ambition," said Ko Moun, mouthing his words, as he always did when coining a maxim, "is like dead meat—it has a tendency to be high. I shall die, as I look back on my past life, a contented and happy man. Will you, with hopes dashed and ambition unsatisfied? Never! But Ko Tun Min is still a child, and that is why I have spoken. Abandon the impossible."

"I shall see Minkalé first. Perhaps she has been coerced. You never had any respect for Ko Ba Shin, I know."

"He is a common type of man that worships the rising sun. He worshipped you till a greater light appeared on the horizon. If that light went out, he would take you on as a god again."

"Then you think she might have been coerced?"

"No."

"Anyhow, it's the least I can do. Women have many moods and minds, just as the skies have. She mightn't want to shine on Ko Walworth any more."

"Well, well; go and see. But tell me something of Shwegyn and its pleasaunces."

"Pleasaunces? You mean Courts and gaols and death-chambers!"

Ko Moun smiled, and, noting the reawakening of Tun Min's sense of humour, began at once to take a cheery view of the future.

"I know of dacoits, and pleaders, and touts, and Chetties," said Tun Min, continuing; "but, by the way, what is a Chetty?"

"He is a necessity. You see, the Burman is by religion a beggar, by heredity a pauper, and by habit a borrower. The forces of Nature, having thoughtlessly produced within him a taste for borrowing, had to provide for its gratification. It was a new idea. Nature had never before had such an exacting call on her resources, so she set to work in a nervous experimental way, and——"

"And produced the Chetty?"

"After she had got and mixed the right proportions of patience and intelligence, and of energy and vigilance, which she baked till the whole shone like ebony——"

"And then?"

"Then she went out to find a kindly spirit to animate it. But——"

"Well!"

"Unfortunately, she left the office babu in charge. Of course, he slept, and the restless soul of a blood-sucker saw his chance."

"He just crept in," laughed Tun Min, "and made off with the elaborate system of book-keeping that lay hard by."

"Wherever there is a borrower, Tun Min, you will now find a Chetty sitting by ready to get his teeth in the moment the meat is exposed."

"He's learnt a few more games," said Tun Min, "since his first incarnation. He's not above doing a little trading in stolen currency notes."

"His finance has a catholic foundation, like the saya's church at Mandalay. But what has reminded Ko Tun Min of stolen notes in particular?"

Tun Min told his father the story as simply as he could, as Ko MOUNG had a certain nose for embroidery, and would have detected the least exaggeration. When Tun Min had finished, Ko MOUNG took a long breath, and helped himself to some lime sherbet. He thought it had a pleasanter flavour, and that it would cool his blood, heated as it had become by listening to a tale of downright villainy that might have engulfed his only son.

"That, Ko Tun Min, was a formidable conspiracy," he said, after a few mouthfuls of the draught had lubricated his speech. "The Bench Clerk, the pleader, the policemen, and the Chetty! But it is Imperial to choke the great intestine of jurisprudence, and these obstructions will never really be cast out. But Zeta! My word! With my own hand will I present a petition to the Throne asking for that brave girl to be rewarded. Let a public fountain be built, and called the 'Zeta,' where the righteous that thirst in the Imperial courts may drink."

"Never mind Zeta. Do you really think the conspirators will get off?"

"They'll go to the Andamans all right. When I said the administration of justice would never be purified, I meant it couldn't be. I defy you or anybody else to invent a judicial organism that won't decompose and generate the most awful plague germs and stinks—what else are touts, pleaders, process-servers, Bench Clerks, and interpreters?"

"Oh, I would like the Babu to hear," said MOUNG Tun Min with one eye on the clock as it was approaching the hour for Minkalé to be in, "that you regard

him as a plague-germ and a stink. But meanwhile he's got enough to put in his hooka and smoke before the Sessions Judge pays us a visit."

"Don't you, my son, look forward to the Judge's visit."

"Why?"

"He's a sportsman, and is accustomed to mention the results of his judicial labours in sporting terms: he talks of scalps, and snipe, and heads, and couples when he tots up the convictions at the end of a busy day. Give a shikari like that a wide berth, or he may shoot at sight, and drop you for the fun of the thing."

"The bar wouldn't tolerate a Judge like that; he'd be fired out!" said Tun Min, feeling that Ko Moungh must be getting old indeed to be turning out wishy-washy stuff like that.

"The Bar? Hasn't Spicer told you to spit on it?"

"On the native Bar? Yes."

"I mean the white Bar. The full-blown Woolone Dawya Min. I've told you the story of Colonel Bizzy-Buster, haven't I?"

"No."

"It was at Meiktila, and one of your gownsmen appeared full of importance till the Colonel explained his policy, which was to convict either the accused or his counsel. That barrister was outside the jurisdiction in the quickest possible time, while his client was sent to the gallows all right."

"Did a grateful Government reward the Judge?"

"They made him a C.S.I."

"Was there much competition for it?"

"I tell you there was. Cruncher's second wife had

had triplicates, but Spring had eaten two dorians in less time than it took the Chief Commissioner to shave. They were held to have tied, but as they couldn't run that heat off again, they gave the medal to Bizzy-Buster, and closed the controversy. The clown in Aung Zay's pwe has made great fun of it."

"He's a liar of liars, and I've got my eye on him. He'll be in gaol yet. Well, I feel much better for Ko Moun's cheery talk. I must go and change. I wish I could hope for something from the coming interview."

"Promise me one thing before you go."

"And what is that?"

"That you count five every time you are tempted to say anything venomous. It is a certain Christian tip for the next world."

"But you and I are still in this world, and we don't model our lives on tips. Are we waiters in a railway restaurant?"

CHAPTER V

KO MOUNG was very well known not only to Burmans, but to Englishmen, as a gifted conversationalist, and when Tun Min left him for his interview with Minkalé, it was as a man braced to cope with a difficult situation. Moun Ba Shin was, however, in a very different frame of mind, and seeing Tun Min approach from his bedroom balcony, hastily let himself out at a back door, and hiring a native boat, left for a cruise in the muddy waters of the Pegu River. Ma May had been busy all day arranging for the feeding and robing of a hundred monks to celebrate her daughter's "nuptials," and had not returned, so Minkalé was left alone to face the disappointed and contentious Tun Min. But a Burmese woman never recoils from the inevitable, and Minkalé descended the stairs to receive Tun Min, not willingly perhaps, but still, without any fear as to the issue.

"Is Ma Minkalé alone?" he asked, as he stood at the door.

"She is. But stay. I feel highly honoured by your timely arrival for my wedding. Did Ma Zeta give you the packet of let-pet I packed for you in a highly aromatic envelope? Surely!"

"Zeta is never cruel," said Tun Min, looking very pale and amazed at Minkalé's brutal coolness.

"It is our national custom, and a very pretty one," said Minkalé, admiring her engagement ring and holding her hand so that the diamonds shone in Tun Min's face.

"Minkalé, it will never be our national custom for a girl to jilt a man and then ask him to her wedding, and this hypocritical levity on your part is perfectly detestable——"

"You've come to let yourself go, haven't you?" said Minkalé, calmly smelling a rose she had removed from her hair.

Just for a moment Tun Min was dazzled by her beauty, and all his old love for her reasserted itself; but it was only for a moment. Her calm and self-possession in the presence of the man she had deceived and betrayed annoyed and disgusted him, and he began to be aware of a loathing that ousted his love. The Burman is inflammable, and in his country's annals there is no commoner crime than murder in circumstances such as these; but Minkalé's carefully rehearsed demeanour, while it cut him to the quick, had the effect of inducing him to present an equally calm exterior.

"She wishes to show," he reflected, "that she doesn't care an Englishman's damn for me, and it will be more dignified if I merely show that I think even less of her."

But it was his long training and discipline as a monk that came to his assistance, and the passion in Tun Min's soul was extinguished.

"Why did you do it?" he asked softly, when the storm had passed.

"Do what?"

"Throw me over for Walworth."

"Because he asked me to."

"Was that enough?"

"Yes."

"But supposing I asked you to give him up for me, would that be enough?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not a fool."

"There is a great deal in woman," said Tun Min, thinking aloud, "that is an open book to man, but not her mind."

"That," said Minkalé, with just a trace of warmth, "is what men say and think with the fatuousness of their sex. A woman's mind is simplicity itself: she can discriminate between a good offer and a better just as a man can, but she chooses the better."

"And a man?"

"With his rudderless heart I'm afraid his affections are not always very well steered."

"Is that Walworth or me?"

"You."

"But you kept me on the string for quite a long time."

"Oh, certainly! I was breaking part of my contract with you, but it wasn't necessary that I should break the whole of it. In fact, it greatly consoled me to think that I could still sweeten your destiny——"

"You don't expect me to swallow that?"

"Doubt me now, but when the next gazette comes

out and you're posted to Prome as an Extra-Assistant Commissioner, you'll, I hope, think a little more kindly of Minkalé the jilt."

The news just broken to Tun Min was perfectly true, but the suggestion that Minkalé had had any share in contributing to Tun Min's appreciation at headquarters was wholly and absolutely false. Spicer's opinion of a subordinate was received and acted on in the secretariat with promptitude, and the credit for the step was Spicer's alone. But Minkalé had heard from Cruncher that it was coming, and she at once decided that she would be the first to impart the information, and leave it to Tun Min to think that he owed it to her; in fact, she had wired the news to Shwegyn, but the myook had left ere the telegram was received.

Tun Min was silent.

"You wanted to rise and shine, didn't you?" asked Minkalé, to whom the silence was oppressive.

"Not alone."

"It is not necessary for you to live alone."

"Having decided what's best for yourself, you might in pity leave me to choose for myself."

There was another pause in which Minkalé devoutly wished that Tun Min, who was subject to waves of passion, would abruptly get up and go, but she was disappointed. There were other questions that he had to ask, and quite another light to throw on Minkalé's approaching "marriage" from the bright and dazzling one in which she had been accustomed to view it.

"You said rise and shine just now, Ma Minkalé."

"I did."

"Are you rising and shining too?"

"I am."

"For how long? Has it occurred to you that there is a possible eclipse awaiting you just when you least either want or expect it?"

"I'm deeply interested in astrology," said Minkalé with a yawn, "but won't it keep for another time?"

"It can't, for I shall never see you again."

"Don't say that."

"It is said. But how long do you hope to reign?"

"I asked Ko Walworth that, and he said 'Till death do us part,' and I'm sure he meant it. You know the giddy, frivolous side of his nature, and you think that he regards me as his plaything, and as children grow out of toys that I shall be discarded for one or more that appeal to maturer tastes. But you can never judge one man by another. I know exactly what you have in your mind—you're thinking of Dibbs and Dobbs, or Bobs; but they were depraved men with no lofty ideals, and, believe me, Ko Walworth has. Captain Cruncher has the greatest regard for him, and is never tired of foretelling big things of him as he rises and shines."

"You can tell one man from another," said Tun Min quietly and without apparent emotion.

"When?"

"When it is his national instinct—his natural law—that he is obeying."

"Is marriage a national instinct?" asked Minkalé, thinking she had Tun Min on velvet.

"Did you mean concubinage?"

"No."

"But you are not marrying Walworth in Church, are you?"

"No."

"Then you won't be his wife in law. What I wish to impress upon you is that marriage is a national instinct, and that a man follows a natural law when he marries a woman of his own race, and in the end the instinct and the law will prevail."

"I can point to many cases to the contrary."

"And in everyone of them the man was ruined. Ask the Sayadaw, and he will tell you their promotion was stopped, and that in Society they were shunned. Walworth is no fool. He has made up his mind to rise and shine, and, believe me, he has no intention of being a falling star."

"What then?"

"When his first furlough is due he'll assemble a committee of luyis, much as the Government does a veterinary board when they are casting a commissariat bullock. Minkalé will be cast, but the board will be her trustees, administering, it may be, a few thousand rupees, so as to keep her and her babies from want."

"You do him an injustice," said Minkalé coldly.

Such a thought had repeatedly invaded her mind whether she was alone or in company, but she had ruthlessly evicted it and shut the chambers of her mind on what she considered were impossibilities.

"You'll admit there's nothing commoner."

"I do," said Minkalé; "but what's commoner than

bad language. Do you tell me that there's none that's good?"

"The time for honeyed words comes and goes. It slips away unobserved," said Tun Min, shedding a tear.

"I am satisfied," said Minkalé, without noticing Tun Min's distress.

What had made the deepest impression on Tun Min throughout the interview was Minkalé's failure to express the least regret for the disappointment she had occasioned him, or to ask his pardon for the wrong she had done. He had read a good many novels at Shwegyn which showed what English women would have done in the circumstances, and had expected an affecting scene in which his forgiveness was wrung from him on bended knee. But Minkalé recalled no English character either good or bad, and he concluded that she must have lost her reason.

"Minkalé," he said, in a tone of commiseration, "is obsessed. It is the glamour of his Imperial rank——"

"It was that that put you in the myook's chair."

"It was," said Tun Min dolefully, "and it is the same will-o'-the-wisp that puts you in the Wundauk's bed."

There was no indelicacy in such a remark as made by a young Burman to a young Burmese lady. There are still spacious compounds on this planet where perfectly natural sexual relations are permitted to be mentioned without unnatural blushes.

"Don't begin to move. Stay just a minute or

two. I also have a little to say. I won't say that you've had most of the talk, but you've directed it into a channel that I should have kept it out of—if I could. But that's past, and I'm not blaming Ko Tun Min. But I don't want him to go without just one word of explanation——”

“One wouldn't be enough.”

Minkalé repressed a smile.

“Well,” continued Minkalé, “we shall in all probability, as Burma is a big place, never meet again——”

“Never.”

“I'm not going in the conventional manner of girls to ask you to think kindly of me. That is impossible, isn't it?”

“Quite.”

“But there are just one or two impressions I'd like, for both our sakes, to correct. You thought me very heartless?”

“I do still.”

“Because I have expressed no regret and have shed no tears. Supposing I had told you that I was very sorry——”

“I shouldn't have believed you, but it would have been good form.”

“I see,” said Minkalé, feeling quite unreprieved, and, indeed, rather merry at the suggestion, “good breeding requires one to convey the impression that one is a born liar—well, then, I'm glad I didn't.”

“But you can't pretend that you ever did feel sorry for me.”

“Not really. You see a woman about to be married

thinks she's the pivot on which the world revolves. She's dead to the world—is sorrow, worldly or otherwise? Unless it is some blood-curdling tragedy nothing will direct her heart and mind to other things than her trousseau, her new home, and her equally new husband."

"Not husband."

"That is unkind of you. The other idea is that I have not asked you to forgive me. Was such a thing possible?"

"No. But that also would have been good form."

"So that I was to tell a lie for myself, and ask you to perform a miracle for yourself. Anyhow, we can part in peace. Good-bye."

Minkalé rose, and with a nod of her pretty head, turned her back on Tun Min, who stood on the step for a moment, and then sprang off from it as though some necessity for haste had suddenly occurred to him.

"It was a drawn battle," he said to his father on his return, "in which neither of us behaved like men and women."

"Then like what?"

"Like a pair of actors who were not in love with their parts."

"It is well."

"Why?" asked Tun Min puzzled.

"Had you behaved like a Burman you'd have killed her. Had she behaved like a Burmese woman, she'd have yelled for police, and have given you in charge for an attempted liberty; and, mind you, she's an appetizing morsel. You'd be convicted."

"I'm thankful it's all over, and yet I'm not," said Tun Min, throwing himself down on the carpet and shading his eyes with his hand.

"That is natural," said the philosopher, "for the currents of love and hate, when heated by passion, get into the wrong arteries; but when you've had a cold bath you'll be all right. She told you her choice was irrevocable?"

"In the most callous way."

"She's chilled you off for good? That shows character. I'm sure she's convinced you that she has acted for your benefit."

"Oh yes, and successfully!"

"We mean different things."

"She meant that she'd been instrumental in getting me promotion. According to her I'm promoted Wundauk and posted to Prome."

"So that was the secret Zeta called round to communicate, but finding you out, went off in a huff, as if an old father's feelings were quite imponderable."

"Zeta here?"

"Yes. Cruncher is transferred to Prome as D.C., and as Alpha was quite incapable of superintending the move, Zeta was wired for. Well, you've scored whoever was the author; but it might have been Minkalé."

"Why?"

"The Commissioner was here without his wife, and Minkalé was invited to dine. He was charmed, and the bangles she wears are his gift."

"Bother the Mingyis and Minkalés!" said Tun Min,

raising himself. "It's Zeta that I want to see. She is a brick."

"Here she is," said Zeta, smiling sweetly and shikoing to the aged Ko MOUNG as he went to the door to receive her.

"You are the light," said Ko MOUNG, "and in our darkness we need you."

CHAPTER VI

WITH the fondness of Burmans for pet names, Zeta had been known in her childhood as "Sunlight," but later, as she grew up and the breezy side of her character developed, her friends called her "Fresh air," for from the moment she entered a Burmese dwelling till she left, the atmosphere was thoroughly ventilated by her cheery good-nature and bonhommie. She could, of course, bite—what woman can't?—but it was her ready gift of sympathy that touched and healed more often than her talent for amusing that constantly widened the circle of her friends.

"Does Cruncher know you're here?" asked Tun Min, suggesting a comfortable corner on a Donabyu mat, near which lay a cushion in a brown-holland cover, in case she might like to rest a weary elbow on it.

"All Cruncher knows is that I'm a wild bird, and that the scissors were never made that would clip my wings. I roam where I like, and at present I like to be here. Has the good news reached Ko Tun Min?"

"Is Walworth dead?" asked Tun Min, making a grimace as if he wanted the spittoon a little nearer.

"Walworth pleases nobody but himself, and just at present it won't be his own hand that gathers him to his fathers, as the nuns used to say. No. But surely you've heard that you're going to Prome, and we too? Isn't it lovely?"

"Minkalé told me of my promotion and transfer, and suggested——"

"That they were her wedding gift to you," said Zeta with her merry laugh resounding through the house. "She has an extraordinary imagination—always did at the convent, too, where the Mother Superior called her a dreamer. But I never call a daub a picture."

"You called her a liar?" said Tun Min, beginning to be amused.

"With all my heart, and more than once; but the curious part of it is that she never believed me, and thought my judgment was at fault."

Ko MOUNG said nothing, but, like an old man, was intensely amused by such childish prattle, and while he listened, employed his hands in rolling betel chews for his delightful guest as well as for himself and his son.

"I saw her an hour ago, and sometimes wish it was for the last time," said Tun Min, recalling an interview of which he had a dull conviction that it had on the whole brought him less credit than it did Minkalé.

"The fire of love," said Ko MOUNG, tendering the chews with a shaky hand, "is not immediately extinguished by the water of disappointment."

"That," said Zeta, "is because Ko Tun Min's love

is pure and burns with a white heat. But Ma Lé! Do you think that Walworth's and Cruncher's love would take a lot to put out?"

"What sort of a love is theirs?"

"Sheer brute sensuality," said Zeta, who always spoke her mind.

"Then why did you go to him?"

"We girls get the credit of knowing a lot before we're married, but there are no accounts with more false entries. Take it from me that we don't. Didn't I have it from my mother that connubial slumbers were the most soothing? Well, I've had a rude awakening."

"Still you go back to Cruncher."

"And shall continue to do so. Why not?"

"Unless the future is in tune with the past," said Ko Moun, showing a disposition to take part in the conversation, "there will be no happiness."

"Exactly. My life can never flow in the old channel," said Zeta, "and as I want it to go on flowing, it must be in the one I've fallen into."

"Then there are compensations," said Tun Min, who guessed that Zeta might be without a bed of roses, and still have a path that was strewn with flowers.

"Many," said Zeta perfectly frankly. "There's the intoxication of feeling that I'm the senior lady in the district: policeman salute, municipal luyis shiko, my diamonds dazzle, and I still have the hope of a white baby or two."

The casual observer has often wondered at the readiness with which the Burmese girl walks into

concubinage with the young European, but there is no simpler and yet truer explanation of the sad relationship than in the Burmese desire to have fair children.

"But," said Tun Min, who wanted much more light, "aren't you often depressed by the fear that Cruncher may possibly wish to live his English life again?"

"And I be discarded? No."

"Why not?"

"Cards and dice are a woman's invention. All women are born gamblers—some of us, like your friend Minkalé, desperate and unscrupulous gamblers. Don't be shocked. And our capital to gamble with is in our youth and beauty, in our sensuous figures and aromatic natures. And they're all liable to speedy decay——"

"Except the last," said Tun Min, who loved the aroma in Zeta's nature.

"And curiously enough," said Zeta smilingly, "that is the least valuable of our assets."

"And yet," said Ko Moun, as if his opinion were not likely to change, "we men are not altogether contemptible."

"People gamble with death," said Zeta, taking little notice of Ko Moun, "why not with destiny? You think the time will come when some white lily will evict me. Let her. But we have a new stream of amorous English youth every cold season, and Zeta, the household drudge, would get another billet. That's unless some young man of her own race touched her giddy mind."

"Which," said Ko MOUNG with knowledge, "is an impossibility."

"Oh, Ko Tun Min needn't fear that Minkalé will look to him for a refuge when Walworth begins to substitute beefsteaks for curries. She is already thinking of the Commissioner in the next division, who actually tossed for her with Walworth, and having lost, said he was young enough to wait."

"What's his name?"

"Treble Bloo. He is to be our Commissioner very shortly, and when Minkalé heard it, her eyes shone like jewelled stars. She's made up her mind to rise and shine in the woman's heaven."

"You're all terribly heartless people."

"That is so. You touch my interests, and I at once put my heart and my honour on one side. There are no rules in our games. But, my dear Ko Tun Min, some of us do consider the interests of others. I'm miserable unless those around me are happy, and thinking of you made me a lonely woman while I was still surrounded by——"

"A host of admirers?"

"Friends, if you please. I simply told Cruncher, when I heard of his transfer, that you must come too, or I should take a house at Shwegyn for a month or so, to be near you, lest you did something rash. Not only you."

"Then who?"

"Ma Lé. Look at the enemies you've made. Spicer said they were a record. And I made up my mind that I must get you out of that slaughter-house. But

tell me, why does Ko Tun Min set up these unpalatable standards ?”

“ They are white.”

“ That means they become white people who, after all, live in exalted places, and it is only in the bigger things that their purer principles come into play. But they don’t interfere in the daily round——”

“ Is that why they have Burmans in the lower walks ?”

“ So Cruncher says. He says the national life is corrupt and can be sustained on nothing but corrupt myooks and tsit-kays. He winks at it till that life gets a little too robust and uppish, and then sits down on it hard. His Imperial destiny is to sit hard. Isn’t it funny ?” said Zeta, pretending that she had made a joke.

“ That Deputy Commissioner,” said Ko Moun, “ is a statesman. Burmese appetites will never be extinguished by English standards, but they can be controlled. Ko Tun Min is a controller.”

“ In borrowed plumes. In a white man’s jacket. And that’s why they first mocked him and then put poison in his food—or, rather, stolen notes in his drawer—the same thing.”

“ There’s just one question,” said Ko Moun, trying to chip in.

“ Don’t say I talk too fast.”

“ Supposing Cruncher were to catch Tun Min taking a bribe ?”

“ It would be death to my dear friend, unless I happened to be there,” said Zeta, who felt what she said.

"Then," said Ko Moun with a smile, "Cruncher thakin's theory and practice are at civil war."

"Theory and practice? Ullayga! 'Don't be found out' is his only doctrine of any value. Sometimes Cruncher is very communicative, and he talks of the rice-millers whose business is a swindle from beginning to end, of the import dealers, who pass hours every morning in the bazaar looking at and copying each other's trade marks, and of barristers, who coach witnesses freely. He says it's all right till somebody is found out."

"Then," said Tun Min, "what happens?"

"They bury the culprit in dirt and spit on his grave," said Ko Moun, who knew all about it.

"Now at Prome I shall be near Ko Tun Min, and what lovely times we shall have. I've written and told the bazaar gong that you are my younger brother. He will sedulously circulate that falsehood, and there will be no scandal if I visit you. Don't shake your bullet head. I shall, and though I shall not direct unholy goldmohurs into your tiny pockets, I can bring you outside opinion as to who is on the winning side in the cases you try. Upon my honour, I often tell my husband—you see, I'm quite English now, and say my husband instead of Captain Cruncher—that so and so must get off."

"And does he get off?"

"Cruncher's between two stools then—the Commissioner is one and I'm the other. But, you see, he doesn't go to bed with the Commissioner, so I always win. I shall do the same with Ko Tun Min——"

"Do what with Ko Tun Min?" said Ko MOUNG with a broad grin on his ugly face.

Ko MOUNG's humour was coarse, but it was Burmese, and the joke was appreciated.

"There," said Zeta, blowing a kiss to Ko MOUNG in a manner that was eminently un-Burmese, "take that. It's what Ko Walworth does when I make him laugh."

That, Ko MOUNG simply regarded as bad manners, than which there is no greater sin in the Burmese social code, but she had mixed so long and so intimately with Englishmen that the solecism was condoned.

"Ma Zeta must never speak to me of my cases," said Tun Min, not liking to oppose the wilful lady, but thinking it wise to put his foot down at once on a germ that might grow dangerous and destroy him.

"Ma Zeta means no harm," said Ko MOUNG, thinking there might be a difference which the impulsive natures of the young people might easily widen.

"Remember," said Zeta, looking at Tun Min coquettishly, "that without Walworth to cheer me I shall be desperately dull, and I shall look to you to enliven me."

"Walworth?"

"Yes, Walworth. Why not?"

"He had no time to spare from Minkalé, had he?"

"Oh, but I made lovely inroads on that time, and Minkalé was simply consumed with jealousy. They had to pack her in ice once, and as it got serious, I took a back seat—only for the time."

"Then you like Walworth?"

"He's the best of good company. Utterly depraved, if you like, where women are concerned, but we never object to men for that. It's only men who object to each other for being what they'd all like to be."

"Cynicism," said Ko Moun, putting down his cigar and blowing out a cloud of smoke, "is the child of common sense, but, Zeta, where did you get yours from?"

"Not from Walworth or Cruncher. They're not cynics but epicures. I knew Spicer at Kyaikto. He was known by all sorts of unholy names at Oxford for what they called his 'downright damnable cynicism,' but he charmed me. He said he, too, had frolicked about in the garden of life till his eyes were opened——"

"By what?"

"By a treacherous female who jilted him; and he's such a darling you wouldn't think it possible."

"It's a withering experience," said Tun Min, "and presents life in a sickly yellow light. But, never mind Spicer. How do you think Walworth and Minkalé will get on?"

"Minkalé," said Zeta, putting on her cold, critical manner, and talking measuredly, "has a pretty wit, but it has a point. And, mind you, Walworth presents a large surface to that point, for he's very human. Once out of office, and he's on for any lark. Those little vagaries have more than little consequences—sometimes. He's repeatedly asked me to picnic out with him in his launch—once when he was going to

be away the night. Who do you think will come to a bad end—he or she?”

“Both,” said Ko MOUNG. “And they will come down together.”

“I’m not so sure about him,” said Zeta, taking a cigarette from Tun Min’s case. “Minkalé has no reserve to fall back upon in a crisis, and hers is the average Burmese mind that thinks of revenge when ruffled, which means steering the ship on the rocks. But Ko Walworth never even scratches a mosquito bite. He tries to get what he wants, but if he can’t, then he forgets that he wanted it; and those men never come down, do they, Ko MOUNG?”

“Without fail they do.”

“Why?”

“You can’t create forces and think they’re extinguished when you no longer want them, or when they are forgotten. In fact, that’s just the time they’re most dangerous, as you’re off your guard.”

“Walworth is never on his guard. Don’t repeat it, but Cruncher was saying that he had already had a few ‘stinkers’ from Rangoon connected with what they thought was an irregular life with excesses that couldn’t be good for him, and in his simplicity he wrote back and said that he was changing Yoma for Minkalé, and as the latter was young he thought he’d contemplate no more changes for some time. Well, of course, they simply shrieked when they got that letter.”

“But how about Cruncher?” asked Ko MOUNG, thinking that Zeta, with her talent for romancing, had coined that on the spot.

"Cruncher's abjured promotion, and so they don't mind. Besides, they think he's a little mad. He once administered justice with a coffin on his Bench Clerk's table, just to impress the criminal mind, but it impressed the secretariat very much more, and that impression will never fade."

"Well, I should like Minkalé to be happy," said Tun Min, whose temperature had been cooling all the time that Zeta had been chattering and entertaining both him and his father. "Of course, you will see her again, and if she refers to me, tell her that I bear her no ill-will——"

"That you would like to be friends?"

"No. We've agreed that that's impossible."

"I don't want you to go," said Ko MOUNG, going to the door; "but the D.C.'s orderly has a message for your ladyship."

"What is it?"

"That you mustn't be late for Ko Walworth's last bachelor dinner. I thought they left the ladies out of that."

"So they did out of all dinners, but that was before Walworth came, and he has sweetened our lives considerably. Mrs. Dibs's *bêtise* will never be repeated."

"Oh, what was that? I've forgotten," said Ko MOUNG, puckering his eyebrows and banging a finger on his head.

"Nothing much," said Zeta, looking her wickedest, "but Dibs gave a large dinner-party, and there were many English ladies there. So Mrs. Dibs was told to dine in her bedroom. She wasn't taking any of

that. She appeared at dessert—and so did the carriages of the guests!”

Zeta blushed at the reference to Dibs’s dinner-party, but even in the land of broad latitudes she dared not describe the costume in which Mrs. Dibs appeared to Dibs’s guests.

CHAPTER VII

It was fashionable in the days to which this story goes back for Englishmen in jungle places, and away from English women, to dine in cotton vests and silk pyjamas; but Walworth's "last bachelor dinner" was a ceremonial occasion, and notwithstanding the excessive heat, the black dinner-jacket was thrown over the vest, giving the wearer the appearance of a sleeper roused by the cry of fire, who had fled, snatching what he could of his overnight's costume as it hung from a clothes-horse. There was Cruncher, of course, and Wobbles the chief district policeman, and Teek the forest conservator; but that was the entire white population of Pegu, and at Walworth's particular request, they came accompanied by their respective "wives." Cruncher, as a Deputy Commissioner, had assumed a dignity worthy of his office, and was, as a rule, restrained in his talk and patronizing in his manner; but Wobbles and Teek had come for a riotous evening, and were disappointed to find that Walworth's gaiety was either forced or that it had vanished. They had taken the step, on the threshold of which stood their host, with a light heart, and thought that Walworth's seriousness was quite inexplicable.

"Tell me, Mrs. Cruncher," said Teek, squeezing her

hand under the table, "what has made Walworth so dull? It is quite unlike him. When I was going to be married I thought my watch was moving beastly slow, and I dashed it against a boundary pillar."

"I went one better," said Wobbles, "for I carried my wife off the day before, and when the guests assembled the following day, it was in perfect good faith——"

"That's a lie!" said Mrs. Wobbles indignantly—and it was, but it had the desired effect, and even Cruncher laughed.

"Is Ko Walworth really sad?" asked Zeta, in a tone of commiseration. "I don't believe it. It's only the feeling of a man who's got a ticket for heaven, and looks on his earthly surroundings as dirt."

"I am sorry to be dull," said Walworth, trying to assume a more cheerful tone, "but Mrs. Cruncher, with her usual perspicacity, has very nearly guessed the truth. She said 'ticket for heaven,' didn't she? I certainly have that ticket, but I feel I have no right to it."

"Never throw back on the gods what they give you," said Cruncher, emptying his third glass of champagne, and thanking the Almighty he had never had the sacrilegious feelings that Walworth appeared to entertain.

"That's the only ticket you're allowed to steal," said Wobbles, "without running the risk of gaol."

"Wally isn't such a fool," said Teek with a wink, "as to think that conscience will mix with beautiful

women. I know what it is—it's liver he's got, and, worse luck, connubial bliss is no cure for it."

It was a picturesque party, and the Burmese ladies, with their bejewelled heads and elegant costumes, were a striking Oriental group; but it was the setting that was grotesque. Quite apart from the white hands and faces of the men, and their *négligé* appearance, there was a manifest and emphatic discord between the ladies and the table at which they sat. There is no daintier woman on earth than the Burman, but it must be in her own environment, and as seen in a *zayat* at the Pagoda entertaining her friends on a matted or carpeted floor, she has a natural grace and ease which the West might envy. But she was never made to sit in a chair at a table even imperfectly appointed with the usual English appurtenances of eating and drinking. Cruncher's long experience had accustomed him equally to the smell of cocoanut oil in his pillow, and to the clumsiness with knife and fork of his several spouses as they wriggled in an armed chair. He had come to taking it without emotion, and, indeed, now failed to notice it. Wobbles and Teek had nerved themselves to "temporary necessities," as they called it; but as they could travel on duty, they freely availed themselves of the privilege to escape from harsher surroundings. But in his short study of Yoma, Walworth had come to the opinion that his own nature was not adaptable enough to make him a comfortable husband in the Burmese sense. Moreover, in his serious moments he was assailed by doubts as to whether such domestic arrangements, though sanctioned by long usage, were good for the

cause of Imperialism, and he was most uneasy. His own welfare, he decided, was negligible; but Minkalé's was not, and even more than Minkalé's was the pure name and exalted character of good government. These thoughts had oppressed him before his guests had assembled, and for a time he was unable to disengage his convivial nature from their entanglement; but it is a pleasing property of champagne that it gets home sooner than the consumer, and as Walworth was not in the habit of imbibing, it took possession of him with startling rapidity.

"Do you know," he said, when there was a sudden pause in the conversation, "that I'm getting tight?"

"It's perfectly orthodox," said Teek, who felt himself approaching a similar condition; "you ask my wife. I had an awful head the day I was married, and what a joy it was to her to nurse it."

Cruncher nodded approval, but it was getting past the hour when his conversational gifts consented to shine.

"We used to be taught," said Zeta, "that drink was the root of all evil——"

"No, no!" said Wobbles, interrupting. "It was bracketed first with money and woman. How dare you misquote?"

"But," said Zeta, continuing, "I find it the source of much sweetness. When my husband is seriously put out, I put him in again with a whisky-and-soda, and it restores the equilibrium of his soul."

At a nod from Cruncher Zeta rose, and took the

other ladies into the veranda, which did duty for a drawing-room. There were only the cane tables and chairs of Penang, but it was open all round, and the punkah had a chance of agitating an atmosphere that was cooler than what they had left in a room heated by a superfluity of kerosine oil wall-lamps of a primitive type.

"Ko Walworth," said Mrs. Teek, whose silence at dinner had been enforced by her invincible ignorance of English, "is depressed. What do you think is the cause, Zeta?"

"It's so unnatural," said Mrs. Wobbles, who had quite a warm corner in her heart for her usually cheerful host.

"Perhaps it's conscience," said Zeta in a whisper.

"Why?"

"You know," answered Zeta, laughing, "he's stolen his bride, and now his Christian principles have risen in rebellion, and are just giving him socks."

"What rubbish!" said Mrs. Teek. "It's the oldest custom of all to steal one's wife, and, indeed, it would be dull if we were given as a gift or bought and sold."

"Oh, were you stolen?"

"Rather. As a good Christian I was on my way to be married at the little church in Tharawaddy, and Teek boldly stopped the carriage and proposed. Father, who was usually slow of thought, for once saw the truth in the purest of lights, and handed me over to Teek, who's been as good as gold."

"Did the jilted bridegroom take it lying down?"

"No — standing, protecting his head with his hands."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Mother slipped him when he protested. He now has the impudence to say that he had a narrow escape."

The ladies laughed merrily. They were not really sure whether Mrs. Teek had not invented the story on the spot, but the adventure had been one so delightfully divorced from everything honourable, that it made Zeta's and Mrs. Wobbles's mouths water for a similar experience.

"But," said Zeta, when her laughter had subsided, "there's a nasty flavour about Minkalé's fickleness. She kept Ko Tun Min on the hook till the very last."

"Nothing wrong about that," said both Mrs. Wobbles and Mrs. Teek together.

"Not wrong, but a little mercy would have spared the poor boy a lot of suffering. But he's got over it now, and if Walworth forgot to turn up to-morrow, he'd hear it without merriment."

"We shouldn't," said Mrs. Teek, sitting up to show that she felt what she said. "I for one should burst a bloodvessel, laughing. They've got such swelled heads, you'd think they were white."

"Somebody's been repeating a feminine indiscretion."

"Only one?" exclaimed Mrs. Teek. "Besides, there was no repetition wanted. They say openly, and intending to be aggressive, that we must all shiko to Minkalé when she is married——"

"I?" shrieked Zeta, with her temperature rising characteristically to boiling-point.

"Yes, even you. They say your husband is only a Boh, but Ko Walworth is a C.S., and between the two there's lots of thick brown paper."

"I'm top-side though, surely."

"No."

"Ma Lé!" said Zeta now absolutely aflame. "I shall send my orderly to fetch Ma May the first thing in the morning, and won't I just rub her commercial nose in the dirt. I, the D.C.'s wife, shiko to the Wundauk Min's? The woman is mad!"

It is an old, old story, and what district in the Empire is unfamiliar with it? The precedence list is the Englishwoman's Bible, and as it was compiled by an office babu who derived his inspiration at the Civil Service fountain, there are now and again collisions between civil and military, which man, unaided by woman, would avoid, but man aided by woman not only fails to avoid, but incurs at top speed.

"They've got to be civil to you," said Mrs. Wobbles, "but we in the police take a very back seat in the green-coloured list."

"And we in the forests," said Mrs. Teek, looking the picture of mortification, "have no seat at all, or, rather, one that Teek says isn't worth a tinker's curse."

"The pity of it is," said Zeta, "that we must go to the wedding. But I have a brilliant idea. We're giving them a tantalus—such a lovely one, with four bottles of cut glass."

"But you've sent it in?"

"No; I thought we'd use it first at our own dinners, it was so nice. And to-day the boy has been cleaning it up. Well, I'll just fill every bottle with vinegar before it goes. Ma May is sure to taste it to see if it's the best brandy. Ma Lé! She'll guess my meaning all right."

"Don't be silly."

"Silly or not, I mean to do it. And if Walworth is huffy, I know ways to pacify that child."

"Zeta was never a flirt," said Mrs. Wobbles, with a laugh.

"Zeta was never anything else," said Zeta herself, "and neither were you nor any other woman. What a woman is depends on her opportunities, not on her tastes. My dear, we're all made in the same frivolous mould."

Just then there was heard the familiar crash when Cruncher was dining well, and Zeta rose to say good-night. It was the signal for the other guests to go too, and Walworth saw the ladies to the door, and many were the good-byes spoken before Zeta and Mrs. Teek and Mrs. Wobbles consented to let go of his hands. He knew they all loved him, and he would have liked them to stay ever so much longer, but he did not press them to, as he wanted an hour with Teek and Wobbles, and they felt the absence of the pressure they were accustomed to. But with their thorough knowledge of human nature, guessed that he wanted to let himself go on his last bachelor night, and so they took their departure without resentment if not without regret.

"Fill up, Wally," said Teek, taking care that his own glass was full, "if you want to resume our interrupted conversation. But, by God, you'll ruin and blast this damned Empire to hell if you start those novel doctrines——"

"I mean them for the moment, at any rate, and perhaps for always, but that depends on my cerebral processes which are rather cloudy just at present."

"The average civilian," said Wobbles, who had discovered just the kind of chair that suited his after-dinner torpor, "first discovers that he's a prince, next that he can run royalty damned cheap on a rupee a day all told, and last of all that he's a public servant; but that's only when he's retiring, and the champagne farewells have touched his liver. But where were you lugged up?"

"Why?"

"Because you're human. And you're not above satisfying your wants rationally. I tell you, Wally," said Teek, who hated prigs, "that it's awful bosh to talk of trusts and trustees with the damned Burman for a beneficiary."

"Call me by names of few or many letters," said Walworth, standing up for his service, "but tell me if there's another service on this planet that can show the record of mine? It wasn't on booze and beauty that they built the noblest of Empires——"

"Then on what?"

"On the granite rock of British principle."

"That be damned for a yarn!" said Wobbles, whose

father and grandfather had been John Company's servants in the garish days, when they thought more of sensuous practice than of moral principle. "Who were our Empire-builders? Were they missionaries? They were an illustrious race of soldier-civilians who put the man of a conquered race on a much lower plane than they did the women of the country. Drink to his memory."

"We have pushed on a bit since the corrupt days of Clive and Hastings. What about Napier, and Lawrence, and Gordon? Clive was a plundering dacoit, and Hastings a wholly unprincipled circle thugyi as compared with the noblemen who may truly be called our Imperial missionaries."

"But what's put these grandiose ideas in your noddle."

"Of course, Minkalé."

"Is that all?" said Wobbles with a guffaw. "Well, she'll lose nothing if you keep your principle and chuck her. Don't be shocked. But I had a letter from Treble Bloo, saying he was coming up for the wedding, or, rather, he was hoping that you had cooled, and that there'd be no wedding. He's coming in a launch, and has made provision for two——"

"Should Minkalé return with him?" asked Walworth, visibly annoyed.

"Yes; she's all right."

"That," said Walworth, with determination, "finishes it. To think of surrendering Minkalé to an infernal swine and bounder like Treble Bloo! Such a possible catastrophe awakens many sensibilities

that I hadn't suspected. I'm not jealous, but I shall save Minkalé from damnation if not from death."

In an instant was the whole current of Walworth's life altered by just a whisper. On what a very little hangs a great deal in the laboratory of Nature! To think that a casual remark thoughtlessly made should have such momentous consequences! That it has is a platitude in more places than the philosophy of Buddhism, where the most imponderable causes are viewed with the alarm occasioned by devouring monsters.

"We've actually brought Walworth up to the scratch," said Teek, filling all the glasses for a doch-and-doris.

"Do you know, Walworth," said Wobbles, putting his glass down, "there's no apparent god in a Buddhist country, but custom and the concubine is its highest expression. We promised in the proclamation of 1857 never to interfere with the custom of the country. Well, I've gone one better, and have merely impressed my own individuality upon that custom. It suits the country, and it suits my nature. And if you'll only give it a dog's chance, it'll keep you going till you're ripe for pension. Good-night, old chap."

When his guests had gone Walworth threw himself into a long arm-chair, and wondered how it was that Teek, an old Marlburian, and Wobbles, a Wykehamist, with the great traditions of their respective schools, could become the apostles of a loose morality.

"I," he reflected, "was badly brought up in a den

of impurity at home, where no gospel was taught but self; at school they taught little but Greek and Latin; and at Oxford there was but one god, and that was self-advertisement. Slender equipment at its best for an Imperial office, but apparently better than what's sold much dearer at the public schools."

CHAPTER VIII

THE world that Minkalé looked out upon from her bedroom window on her wedding morn was one of gorgeous beauty. Nature both within and without, she thought, were absolutely in tune. It was late for padouk to be in flower again, but it was a special occasion, and stretching a point, Nature spread out before her with both hands such a wealth of green and gold as had never before been seen in Pegu. The whole country round appeared aflame with the gilded tops of the Pagoda, the gaudy bunches of goldmohur, and the golden forests of padouk caught alike by the gladdening rays of the morning sun. There were lilacs, too, that grew in wild profusion, and the stately palmyra that seemed to keep its vigils like some river god solicitous for the frail craft that rode on deep and stormy waters, and Minkalé was in raptures with the scene. Men and women moved about below her window, and talked and laughed, and hearing her name, she knew it was her wedding that was the general theme, and a gentle intoxication stole over her girlish soul.

“We mustn’t be late,” said the harsh voice of her mother from below; but Minkalé knew there was plenty of time, besides, it was her day, when she was

permitted to impose her will on everything and everybody, and she spread out her wedding presents, feeling she would never be tired looking at them. There was a diamond pendant from Walworth that had the first place of course, but her father's gift was superb, and Minkalé knew to an anna what those rubies and emeralds had cost. She kissed the pearl necklace from her mother, and when she had adjusted it round her pretty neck, was satisfied with the effect, feeling there were not many women whom it would have suited so well.

Walworth, on the other hand, awoke with a splitting headache, as, indeed, did Teek and Wobbles, but the recuperative forces of youth, abetted by judicious doses of Eno, work marvels, and by the time it was necessary for the "business" to begin, nobody would have suspected that the night before still lingered in the morning after. But Walworth had very definite ideas, which had survived the last bachelor dinner, that he was about, not to make a damned fool of himself, for of himself he thought the least, but to wreck a young life, and to commit an outrage on the best traditions of a great Imperial service. That the girl wanted to be wrecked, and that the service had its bad traditions, though in a lesser degree than the good, made no difference to his clear and discriminating mind, and he began to loathe himself for acting in opposition to what he was convinced was right. But it was, he thought, too late to jump back over an ever widening chasm, and besides, there was that black-guard Treble Bloo to be checkmated, so he decided he would "drift" on the wave of destiny. He was

serious till he saw Cruncher and Wobbles and Teek walk in, dressed like Burmans in shimmering silk putsoes, and white engyis, with fillets of white muslin bound round their heads, and then he laughed uproariously. That day he was never again serious for a moment.

“What cheer!”

“I’ve never bathed a baby in my life, s’welp me!” said Teek, trying to pick Walworth up in his arms. “Come, let’s sponge him and get him the right temperature on his wedding day.”

Even Cruncher, throwing off the frigid dignity of office, confessed to a weakness for “rag,” and in much less time than it takes to tell the story, Walworth was stripped, and much to the amusement of his loogalay, was rudely bathed and dried by three hefty Englishmen, whose capacity for masculine amusement had still the vigour and freshness of England’s public schools about it.

“Damn you rotters!” said Walworth, at last protesting when they insisted on forcing his legs through the arms of his vest. “It’s the loogalay’s prerogative to dress me on my wedding day.”

“And Minkalé’s, by God, to undress you on your nuptial night!” said Teek, pouring with perspiration, for the climate of Pegu was ill-adapted to Teek’s notions of “rag.”

It was hot and thirsty, so the Burmese boy was allowed the honour of robing his master in the Burmese national costume, while the Madrasi butler dispensed cold whiskies and sodas to the amused guests.

“Look here, Walworth!” said Cruncher, making

an effort to express an idea that he had always failed to remember at the right moment, "have I anything particular to say to Minkalé's elders? Is there any settlement?"

"What the devil do you mean?" said Walworth, looking puzzled.

"It's a damned big business," said Teek, recalling his own wedding. "Minkalé's elders will want to know what's agreed upon. They're mighty particular too. She has her dot, and you'll be asked by how much you've increased it; and then they'll want to know whether property acquired after marriage is to be joint or several——"

"When they asked me that," said Cruncher, "I told them Zeta could keep all the babies, and now they've got me in their pwes as a representative Englishman."

"Do my office, my rank, and my brilliant prospects count for nothing," said Walworth, in a tone of annoyance, "when these damned elders are on the war-path?"

"Don't let it bother you," said Wobbles, "it's the merest swank. Just the Burman all over."

It was emphatically nothing of the kind, but a simple and systematic arrangement for the application and distribution of assets in a country where nothing was more necessary, seeing that divorce is as easy as marriage, being in either case consensual. But what the domestic Burman regards as marriage is contemptuously treated by Englishmen as concubinage, and such incidents as trusts and trustees are laughed at as swank.

When Walworth was nearly ready, Cruncher sent his orderly round to warn MOUNG BA SHIN of the bridegroom's approach, so that, when they arrived at the house by the river, everything was in readiness. There was MINKALÉ simply radiant in her happiness, and ablaze with diamonds, seated on the new pink and blue carpet that MA MAY had, after much chaffering, bought at an English store in Rangoon, and near her were her mother and her elders, who were to "settle" the little legal preliminaries; but much to Walworth's amazement, there was no priest, and he found, moreover, to his surprise, that an orthodox Burmese marriage could be solemnized without one. Religion goes in and out of a Burman's daily life in larger proportions than in the Christian's, but that marriage has a religious flavour is to the former a ridiculous idea. What is of much more importance to him is the legal element, which in Walworth's case was not exactly a farce, for though it was understood that the tie was not legally binding, it was felt that such agreements respecting property as were made would have contractual vitality. When the usual greetings had been exchanged, Walworth took his seat alongside his bride, and the proceedings began with Cruncher asking MOUNG GYI, who was one of MINKALÉ's elders, what MOUNG BA SHIN proposed to settle on the bride.

"One lac, my lord."

"Upon such a very young girl!" exclaimed Cruncher incredulously.

"It is the custom, my lord."

"It won't be safe," said Cruncher, shaking his

head, "for the Wundauk Min to add to that settlement"; and then there was a titter as some wild young loobyos at the entrance shouted: "Youk cha pada!"

"Arrest that son of a dog for bad livelihood!" cried Wobbles, and having seen the caitiff pounced on and pinned down he resumed his seat, and the proceedings continued.

"An officer of his sublime rank," said the elder, "endows his bride with enough when he gives her his heart, and the half of his throne."

Then there was general clapping while refreshments were distributed in the house to the assembled guests; but Moung Ba Shin's house was much too small a place to entertain all the friends that were bidden, and the preliminaries being over, an adjournment was made to the compound of the circuit house, where men and women lined up along the roadway in their hundreds to give Walworth and Minkalé a cordial welcome. The Bishop did not appear, but there were, near a distant clump, a group of monks wearing Ma May's gift of robes, who appeared to take a melancholy interest in the gay proceedings. They, however, were the only serious spectators, for the world and his wife had come to enjoy themselves, and neither the one nor the other had the least intention of going away disappointed. There was no band, but there was instead an An Yein Pwe, in which a lady swayed from side to side, and did some marvellous contortions to the accompaniment of a soft-toned harmonicon, aided by a drum and a bamboo split in two that did duty for a clapper. She sang in harsh, metallic tones

such ditties as "Climbing up the Golden Stairs" and "Ta-ra-ra-ra Boom de Aye," and everybody thought what a gorgeous thing it was to be married under Imperial auspices.

"I shall never stop laughing," said Teek, handing Zeta a glass of champagne. "I think I shall buy Moun Ba Shin."

"That unclean thing," said Zeta, making a grimace.

"Look at the holy calm on his face. He's been a thorough blackguard all his life, and thinks he's got a clean slate now that he's bought Walworth with Minkalé."

"Oh no!" said Zeta, shaking her head. "If he built a hundred Pagodas and gilded them all with the gold of good works, he'd still have a debit balance to wipe out. Hear Ma May on him."

"On her own husband?"

"That's a business relationship, as you've just seen. She's foretold it that he has to do ever so many slimy incarnations as a snake, a leech, and a crocodile, and with intermediate ones as a tick, a bug, and a cockroach. She loathes him."

"Tell me, Zeta, does a Burmese woman ever love her husband, and, if so, for what?"

"Oh yes, she often has the sense to. He can be generous though wealthy, and, mind you, he's meant to be the father of her children——"

"And their playmate and caretaker-general," said Teek, hitting the nail of national character on the head.

"It's very appropriate," said Zeta, keeping one eye on Minkalé's attentions to Treble Bloo, who was

now very much in evidence. "You see, looking after babies does not require much intellect, and, mercifully, the Burmese man has none. But if it's business that's afoot, then tell me, Ko Teek, is the Burmese woman badly equipped?"

Teek expressed a doubt.

"See how Minkalé allowed Ko Walworth to elbow Ko Tun Min out. Wasn't that clever of her?" asked Zeta.

"Brains seldom go with bodies," said Teek, gently pressing Zeta's foot with his own, "and, Zeta, I needn't tell you that your architect was no fool."

"My architect? Ma Lé! why, mother always said that he was the biggest of fools!"

"Was she referring to her husband?"

"I'm not sure," said Zeta with a laugh.

It was a tedious performance, but Walworth and Minkalé made the entire round of MOUNG BA SHIN'S guests, and received the hearty congratulations of those that were not suddenly struck dumb by the Imperial magnificence of the occasion, with every symptom of pleasure, for while Minkalé smiled on the men, Walworth, bubbling over, cracked jokes with the women, who were all very fond of him. At last, however, they were free to join their own circle, and to be seated while a local photographer took several sittings, as MOUNG BA SHIN had liberally ordered a thousand copies wherewith to decorate not only his private residence, but all public places in the town.

"Where are you off to for your honeymoon?" asked Treble Bloo of Minkalé, but she only pointed to Walworth.

"Oh, your own house! How prosaic!"

"No!" said Walworth with venom in his tone. As a matter of fact, the venue of the honeymoon had been kept a close secret, and advisedly so, for in barbarous countries marriage is associated with savage customs not the least disgusting of which is the stoning of the house by night where the newly-wedded couple have taken up their residence, in the hope of being bought off with silver and gold.

"I thought you might have my launch," said Treble Bloo innocently, "if you chanced to be going my way—to Kyouktan."

"Some other time, thank you," said Minkalé.

"No other time," vowed Walworth inwardly, feeling that given time and opportunity, nothing would please him better than to reduce certain meaty parts of the Tennaserim Commissioner to pulp.

While they were talking, a message was received from the station-master to say that their train had left the next station, and that meant they had but few moments to lose; but in those Cruncher proposed their health, which Walworth actually acknowledged from the dogcart in which Minkalé sat by his side and beamed on the crowd.

"It's damned good of you all," said Walworth. "And when I come back we can have it all over again."

"Not all," protested Minkalé, in a voice that was meant for her spouse alone.

"She did look pretty," said the crowd as it melted; but Bindasery, the orderly and fortune-teller, thought otherwise.

"In nature," said Bindasery, talking to the Punjaubi policeman left in charge of Walworth's house, "the snake does not bite the scorpion, but the miraculous will happen."

"What will happen?" asked the policeman, peeling a plantain.

"The bride will bite the bridegroom—he is dead, and you may dig his grave."

"Go and stuff your dirty mouth with mud," said the policeman, who belonged to a frontier tribe, with the male members of which seduction was not only a manly art, but an hereditary gift. "He is young and she is young, and if she be a little pretty—why, it just puts an edge on his appetite, you fool!"

"That's like a lewd Punjabi," said Bindasery, who was not in the least afraid of the stalwart limb of the law. "You see a buxom wench, and you make her yours: you have no stomach for anybody's rights but your own."

"You didn't say he'd run off with another fellow's girl—not that there's anything wrong about it—but when I'm talking I like to keep things on a clear horizon. What makes you mix snakes and scorpions with brides and bridegrooms?"

"She who bites once can bite again, and as for his sting, there isn't an inch of my body I can sit on—I must either stand or sleep on my face."

"Wah, wah!" said the policeman. "The Wundauk saheb bahadur is a fine fellow. But who has she bitten?"

"The myook of Shwegyn."

"That sickly, puling monk. I should think she has. Every girl wants a man for a husband."

And thus it happened that from the Deputy Commissioner of Pegu down to the lowest constable in the gamut of Imperialism, there was not a single discordant note of disapproval sounded when the seduction of Minkalé was accomplished.

* * * * *

Ko MOUNG and MOUNG TUN MIN had left Pegu together by an early train, but had halted at Nyaunglebin to have a chat with a septuagenarian Woon, who had held office under Mindoon MIN at Shwebo, and were now on their way to Poozonmyoung, when, at the level-crossing, they met the bridal train. As the white-painted first-class carriage approached, TUN MIN looked up, and he saw WALWORTH put his arm round MINKALÉ's neck and kiss her with the warm kiss of passion.

"May I be blind for evermore!" he prayed.

KO MOUNG, too, looked up and saw what had disgusted his son, but he simply said :

"That's an emotion which soon passes. When the thirst is quenched, the crystal brook inspires no thoughts."

PART III



CHAPTER I

THE Anglo-Indian policeman has left many impressions on the untutored English mind, which were equally unfavourable and unfounded; but of Mortlock's capacity to deal with crime, and energy in following up the slightest clues, there was never the smallest difference of opinion. There were those who objected to the trial of Tun Min's enemies dragging on for nearly a year, seeing that two of them were taken red-handed; but the conspiracy had wide ramifications, and as the investigation proceeded one discovery after another came to light with such startling rapidity that, had Mortlock been permitted to continue his examination any longer, it seemed probable that half the district would be in gaol.

Mortlock was disappointed and disgusted at the prohibition, but was consoled as trial after trial concluded with the conviction of the greatest of Shwegyn's malefactors. What afforded him, however, the greatest satisfaction was the simple case of Tun Min and the hidden currency notes, of which he had been the merest spectator, and which by itself had called for no detective skill whatever.

"The simplest cases," he reflected, "work out automatically. We put the accused in the dock, and

when they begin to incriminate each other they are without an equal in the art of advocacy."

Mortlock was right, and his ripe generalizations were fully verified by the proceedings in Bungoo's case, as it was commonly called, from the fact that it was popularly believed to have been concocted in the pleader's brain.

Bungoo was a product of the Bengal schools of law at a time when the Dhurmtoolla lawyer had established his claim to be regarded as the finest liar on earth, and it was Bungoo's ambition to prove to a critical world that his professional notoriety was deservedly achieved. He disappointed neither himself nor the world, for, on being retained in a case, his first and chief inquiry was to know what and how many lies he was to tell, and as a rule he lied with equal judgment and fecundity. But so far his experience had all been what he termed "altruistic," inasmuch as he had been philanthropically concerned in protecting the interests of others. Now, however, it was his own case, and the stake was high, and Bungoo was far from happy. He had secretly made overtures to Mortlock, and promised to unlock the criminal secrets of a dozen districts if pardoned; but Mortlock was interested in no district but his own, and the secrets of that were in his keeping. This failure greatly depressed Bungoo, who thereafter tried to come to terms with his co-accused, promising to memorialize the Throne if they would only say that he was their unwilling agent coerced by bloody threats of murder; but the only answer he got was that it was better form to sink or swim together.

"We shall see," said Bungoo, in his harsh Bengali voice, "as to who will swim in the deep waters of jurisprudence, my friend."

The time at length arrived, and with it the Sessions Judge, when Bungoo and his confederates must explain or expiate their conduct, and the trial was begun.

"This case," said the Judge, addressing the Public Prosecutor, "is one of great moral depravity, but it is also as clear as the noonday sun. Do the accused urge anything in mitigation of sentence?"

"My lord, my honour," said Bungoo, greatly agitated, "I did not do it with a willing mind. I pray to be heard."

"That is a distinctly good idea, Babu," said the Judge, "as it will obviate the necessity of calling any witnesses. We shall examine the accused first."

In those early days of empire, Judges were greatly respected for their many accomplishments, but legal knowledge was not one of them, and judicial procedure was unorthodox as often as not; but, taking common sense for its guide, it was never contemptible.

"Yes," said the Public Prosecutor, "we know what the prosecution have to say in detail, but there is some confusion and contradiction in the prisoner's examination before the Magistrate—just a little more light, your honour."

"Now, Babu," said the Judge, stopping the Prosecutor's speech, "just you get into that box, and, by God! if you don't tell the truth without persuasion I'll offer your accomplices a free pardon to turn Queen's evidence."

Bungoo grew pale, and his knees knocked as the

briny bay between Burma and the Penal Settlement came within his mental view. That, he thought, was not British justice to think of offering a pardon to one in order that another might confess. But it was a call to brace himself and to keep the national lamp of invention burning brightly, and, making an effort, he stepped down from the dock and into the witness-box.

"I will tell the whole truth," he stammered.

"You'd better," said the Judge sternly, and a cold perspiration broke out on the Babu's bald head as he bowed low to the seat of justice.

"Hirnam Sing," said the Babu, wiping his spectacles, "could tell the truth so as to exonerate poor Babu, but his nature is as bad as my destiny. It was he who was impoverished by the integrity of the myook, and it was in his base heart that the desire for revenge was conceived. What could Babu do? He is not a man that will listen to reason, or to the whispers of conscience. He sat at my threshold threatening to destroy my young children if I did not abet his crime. What was poor Babu to do then? Ah! I had a thought. I would only apparently abet the crime, but would inform when it was complete. Thus would an innocent Judge be saved and a desperate malefactor be enmeshed. But Messrs. Spicer and Mortlock must interfere. It was quite unnecessary, and it placed poor Babu in a most unfavourable light. I beg your honour to be merciful. My poor wife and family——"

Here the Babu broke down and wept bitterly, and had to be assisted back to the dock.

Hirnam Sing had, however, a very different story, and, taking out his pocket-book, proceeded to explain his connection with the sordid crime with the coolness and confidence he had usually shown as Prosecutor in the myook's court.

"I got wind," he said, opening his pocket-book, "at seven p.m. from an informer of the conspiracy, and was told that the departure of the myook for the hospital would be the signal for the Babu to emerge from the laterite ditch and secrete the stolen currency notes in the myook's clothes. It was my duty to be there. I followed him up the stairs, as the Deputy Commissioner has deposed in the court below, and I was just about to arrest him when the Yazo Woon accused me of complicity and made a grab for my neck. Naturally, I bolted. If my presence establishes my guilt, then how about Spicer saheb and Mortlock saheb? They knew that a crime was going to be committed and were there on duty. So was I. How is my case different from theirs?"

"That, thank God," said the Judge, "sews the Babu up."

"I'm afraid," said the Prosecutor, aghast, "that a confession is not available except as against the confessor."

"You make that remark again," said the Judge, pretending to be annoyed, "and I'll report you for incompetency." It was a serious threat, and the Prosecutor resumed his seat.

It was now the turn of MOUNG LONE, the Bench Clerk, who, being a Burman, had all his official life been regarded as a fool, but that was his cunning. He

was, on the contrary, possessed of rather more brains than the average Burman, but after mature consideration he decided to trade on his national character, and was abundantly rewarded.

"I never saw such an idiot," said myook after myook under whom Mounge Lone had served. "He stumbles on confidential letters, pays out deposits to the wrong people, loses valuable exhibits, and sometimes whole records escape his vigilance."

"What do you say, Mounge Lone?" asked the Judge in softer tones than he had spoken to the Kalas in, for he had always kept a warm corner in his heart for the happy-go-lucky Burman, who was everywhere being ousted by the native of India.

"My lord," said the Bench Clerk, "I am simply amazed at my predicament. I believed what I was told, and I ask you to believe what I now say."

"What is the lie?"

"No lie, my lord. The myook is the son of a wealthy father, and in good works has distributed his father's wealth freely. There are scores in Shwegyn whose wants have been relieved by his liberality. But he will never take back what he has lent. I don't know how many thousands the Babu owed him, but, being an honourable man, and finding his offers to repay the loans refused, he sought my help. I saw his distress and consented. It was his idea that I should summon the myook to the hospital while he stuffed the myook's drawers with currency notes."

"Do you propose," said the Judge, "to proceed against the Chetties, the ten-house gong, the circle

thugyi, and the army of hangers-on who are co-accused?"

"It's as Your Honour pleases," said the Public Prosecutor, who knew the Judge's weakness for short cases.

"Damn it!" said Mortlock, cursing the Public Prosecutor. "If you agree to that, I'll have you sacked."

But before there was time for remonstrance, all the other prisoners were released, and enjoined never to do it again, thus depriving Mortlock of the satisfaction of seeing another dozen more or less notorious criminals sent across the bay. But there was a full calendar which would keep the Judge busy for a couple of months, and Mortlock leant back again into his own chair, feeling that the assize would bring him plenty of comfort yet.

There is in Burma an antiquated custom of appointing two assessors to assist the learned Judge in his deliberations; but anything more pathetic than the humble lot of the yokels who sit on a mat below the throne of justice and say "Yes, yes," to the Judge's dicta can scarcely be conceived. They may possibly be a survival of the studious days when earnest Judges groped in the dark for the treasures of national law and custom; but now we credit the judgment seat with a larger legal knowledge than formerly existed in the judgment head, and groping in the dark with or without assessors has become a superfluity.

"As these men have practically confessed," said the Judge, turning to the assessors, "the case has been stopped, and it won't be necessary for you to record

an opinion; but perhaps you would like to say something complimentary to the police for the clever way, on the slenderest hint, that they dived right down to the bottom of this shameful business."

The assessors were not quite the useless type of concurring Judges to whom the Judge was accustomed, and much was his surprise when they brought to his notice the highly meritorious service of the Bench Clerk, in abetting the payment of a debt from which, of course, it was to be inferred that in their pious opinion no crime had ever been in contemplation.

"Well, I'm damned!" said the Judge, turning to Mortlock. "Has either of them ever been had up for bad livelihood, or for smuggling, or for illicit gambling, or have they been adjudicated insolvent?"

"I don't know," said Mortlock, smothering a laugh that had a tendency to break out no matter where he was if only the humour was ridiculous enough.

"I shall adjourn the case, Mortlock, till their antecedents have been thoroughly inquired into by a competent magistrate. I never heard anything more calculated to bring the exalted office of an assessor into contempt!"

"Are the assessors to be on bail, sir?" asked Mortlock, entering merrily into the fun. But there was no section of the code plastic enough for framing an accusation, and they were permitted to go on undertaking to report when wanted.

"That, I think, will suffice," said the Judge. "It will bring a sense of their misconduct home to them."

And the Judge was right. There are those who

have graduated in the pedantry of the West who think that the judicial system of England should be administered undilute to the Burmese baby only just beginning to walk; but there never was a greater mistake. Justice is administered not only with water, but with whisky-and-water as the circumstances of the case require.

The case was practically concluded, for all that remained to be done was the pronouncement of sentence, and Moung Tun Min, who had been frequently brought from Prome to assist the police, was now free to retrace his steps to his own responsible charge; but he was greatly upset by a letter he had received that day from Minkalé asking him to meet her on his way back.

"I have no right to look to you for help," the letter said, "but I have moments of terrible anxiety connected with Ko Walworth, and there is none to advise. Do come if you can."

Tun Min was puzzled to know what to make of the letter. Minkalé had been married for nearly a year, but he had heard nothing of her or from her all that time. Zeta, he knew, had been in correspondence with her, but he had particularly requested her never to mention the jilt, and Zeta, out of respect for his feelings, pushed Minkalé out of her mind when she was near Tun Min.

"I wonder what it can be?" said Tun Min, walking up and down in his veranda while his loogalay packed his "pas" for the journey. "Zeta and she are friends. Moreover, Cruncher is not above giving advice to a beautiful woman, and, what is more, they

have experience in the lines on which Minkalé walks—and I have none.”

He pulled the letter out of his pocket again to see whether it suggested that it had been written in haste; but he found every letter perfectly formed, with the stops in their proper places, and he concluded that it had been written with slow deliberation. There were no marks of tears shed either on the paper or on the envelope, and he further concluded that the document was penned without emotion. At any other time he might have been impressed with the emergent necessity of obeying such a call, whether it came from friend or foe, but just then the thought uppermost in his mind was his narrow escape from the perfidy of his Shwegyn enemies, and his suspicions once thoroughly awakened, he began to see a trap in every proposal and murder in every meal. So great was his obsession that for weeks he had lived on fruits alone, feeling that they could not be tampered with without leaving eloquent suggestions of danger.

“What is it?” he asked himself for the twentieth time. “I have no secrets in common with her, nor do I desire to. If it’s worth my going it was worth her telling—but she thought otherwise.”

“It is a trap,” he said. “But it has come too late to be a danger.”

He telegraphed his inability to see Minkalé without expressing regret or pleading any unavoidable pre-engagement, and stepped on board his sampan in time to catch the night mail to Rangoon, through which he had to pass on his way to Prome. As he lay in his bunk awake, unable to sleep owing to the jolting

of the train, he doubted whether he had sent the right answer. When a monk he had been accustomed to ponder for days the expediency of any particular line of action; but in the Government service such delay would have stamped him as incompetent, and the habit of acting with promptitude was therefore cultivated by Tun Min to being almost a mechanical impulse.

"If I have done wrong," he said to himself, "the sin is that of the Government for inculcating the lessons of haste. And as for Minkalé, she has nothing to complain of if Walworth kills her."

When the train stopped at Pegu in the small hours of the cool morning, he put his head out of the train, and addressed an inquiry to the station-master, by whom he had been recognized.

"Is there any news?" he asked.

"None," said the station-master, in a hurry to see to the train's necessities, "beyond the fact that Mr. Walworth Bubbles has been dropping Mr. Treble Bloo out of a top window, and it's thought that the Commissioner, even if he lives, will be a paralytic for life."

"Oh," thought Tun Min, as he pulled his head in again, "that's her little game! When charged he'll want to prove an *alibi*, and they want me to swear that Walworth was fifty miles from Pegu just when he was holding Treble Bloo by the seat of his trousers some twenty feet above his bathroom puddle. No, thank you."

Satisfied that it was nothing more than a paltry artifice to save Walworth, which, instead of being his

salvation, might end in the ruin of all of them, he was thankful that his judgment had not betrayed him, and he fell asleep.

That Ko Mounng was at Pegu and might like to see his son, of whom he was proud, for a few minutes never occurred to Tun Min. He had been taught in the Kyoung, much as in European monasteries, that the spiritual life can only begin where the natural life ends, and, making an effort, had at any rate achieved the suppression of filial instinct as a first instalment on the sacrificial altars of Buddhism.

"We did not choose our fathers," said an aged monk, "and we do not weep for them."

That monk expressed Tun Min's feelings.

CHAPTER II

THERE are more capitals, ancient and modern, in Burma than there are letters in the alphabet, and of the former, Prome is very far from having been the least. On the contrary, its past is enshrined in noble traditions of sanguinary contests, and in the religious enthusiasm of its inhabitants who gave liberally to the construction of the usual monuments of religious faith. There are Pagodas, and Kyoungs, and Tazoungs, as in a hundred other Burmese cities, in which the lights of regal dwellings have been extinguished, but those are mostly cities that have dwindled and decayed; whereas Prome still pulsates with the life of a vigorous and prosperous community, richly endowed for trade with rail and river, in a country where the communications are a reproach to civilization.

Situate on the banks of the Irawaddy there are few more picturesque views in Burma than the approaches to Prome by river, with its hills on either bank, and Zeta soon discovered that there were few pleasanter ways of passing the long and weary day when Cruncher was on tour, than by taking the daily trip to Thayetmyo and back in the comfortable steamers of the Flotilla Company.

It was on one of these voyages that she persuaded

Tun Min to accompany her partly for his companionship, but in greater part for his health, for he had just returned from Shwegyn looking jaded and played out, without the excuse of anxiety or overwork. They were the only first-class passengers, and as the mate only appeared at meals, they were able to enjoy the freest scope for conversation.

"Do you still often hear from Minkalé?" said Tun Min, standing by the taffrail, watching a few bathers in the muddy waters, as they paddled about heedless of danger, though crocodiles were not unknown in the lower regions.

"Often."

"Curiously enough I heard from her at Shwegyn, and she appeared to have something urgent to say, as she spoke of trouble. She wanted me to call on my way back, but I declined the invitation."

"And you dare to tell me that you acted like a brute, in a tone of rigid unconcern?" said Zeta, who was thoroughly roused by Tun Min's callousness.

"The subject of Minkalé no longer affects my temperature."

"You wouldn't talk like that if you knew all that poor girl had gone through, and had in prospect before her. Don't smile. No one admits more freely than I do that she treated you badly. But who was it that led her into temptation? Whose brain was it that wrote the part she was to play? But never mind that. I want you to feel now that your sympathy would not be wasted upon her."

"Has anything very dreadful happened?"

"I should have told you long ago, but for the fact that you forbid me to mention her name."

"Consider the injunction dissolved," said Tun Min, remembering a bit of legal phraseology that he had recently encountered in his studies.

"I suppose you know that her baby died?"

"No."

"Ko Walworth regarded its birth as a misfortune. That's a man all over. Do you remember the beautiful Ma Mee, the wife of Colonel Timpat. Of course you do. He was Commissioner of Pegu some eight years ago?"

"Yes, but not very well."

"He roundly blamed her whenever she had a baby——"

"Do you mean for not having two or more at a time?"

"For being the sole author of her trouble. Ma Mee was a wonderful girl, but there was a limit to her capacity for performing miracles. That, however, Minkalé could have borne with, for she is fond of white babies, and blame or no blame, she was prepared to have a quiver full, as the Christian says."

"What else has she had to put up with?"

"Don't mention it. But I'm sure—and my husband is also coming to my opinion—that Walworth is crazy."

"I did hear on my way that he had thrown the mingyi, Treble Bloo, out of a top window, and broken most bones in his body. But, Ma Zeta, there is no saner man in the tropics than Ko Walworth."

"What makes you say that?"

"Did any scholar leave the Oxford Durbar so heavy laden with medals? Did Cruncher ever before say a single good word for any man, black or white, till he had studied Walworth for six solid months, and knew him inside and out, and yet pronounced him to be the only intellect in the province. And what did Spicer say of him?"

"What?"

"That he could set the Irawaddy on fire."

"I can assure, Ko Tun Min, that those are one and all symptoms of insanity. Listen and don't shake your head as though you were a marionette. From what you say he must be quite different from all other men, and that in itself excites suspicion."

"What else have you to go upon?"

"Did you ever hear anything more crazy than that he had done Minkalé an unforgivable wrong? And as for the blow to the prestige of his service, you'd think, from the exaggerated way he talks, as if he had exploded a ton of dynamite under it, and blown the Burma Commission to smithereens."

"He's not mad. He's playing some deep game."

"Well, if he is, there is a comic element in it, too, for he professes to be deeply grieved at the wrong he did Ko Tun Min."

Both Zeta and Ko Tun Min laughed long and merrily at such an obviously silly lie as they both thought it to be.

"He isn't offering to restore Minkalé to me, is he?" asked Tun Min, still visibly amused.

"You needn't turn up your nose, then, at Minkalé, even if she would be second-hand. She isn't thread-

bare and out at elbows. But one doesn't know what to think of Ko Walworth. You say he pitched the mingyi out of a window, which means, if it's true, that he's been and buried his future alive in a deep and unmarked grave. If he can do that to himself, you may be sure he'll stick at nothing if it's the riddance of Minkalé that's bothering him."

"Ask her to come and stay with you."

"Indeed, then! He might never take her back again. You men take a lot of managing, and mistakes are not always remedied as soon as you think."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Ma Lé! If you but could! But——"

"But what?"

"It isn't in your destiny."

"Destiny's been known to repent according to the Sayadaw, but what does Ma Zeta know about my future?"

"Do you think that Minkalé and I haven't had Bindasery in to tell our fortunes, and that he has told us all about your hand, and——"

"And about Walworth's too?"

"Yes. And Minkalé grew pale when he said that a woman was to be the ruin of both of you, and that your hands were very similarly marked."

"Bindasery is a liar."

"But he's seen your hands?"

"Yes, and Walworth's too?"

"Then why abuse the poor man? He's told the literal truth."

"Am I ruined?"

"I hope not. But it's how things are shaping.

I don't mean officially, but in your growth of heart and mind. Surely you feel it yourself that in the garden of love you're a blasted and withered tree."

"If that's all that Bindasery meant, then it was a very safe prophecy."

"Why?"

"Show me a man who hadn't found woman a disappointment."

"How about Cruncher?"

"I thought," said Tun Min nervously, knowing he was skating on the thinnest ice, "that his domestic experiments were made in the hope of finding one that wasn't a disappointment."

"You mean to be funny. Cruncher is the most woman-struck man in the world. He lives for them, and do you think one wee little goddess like myself would suffice as a shrine for his adoration?"

"It may be the same with Walworth. But don't you think that there's a lot of exaggeration in the reports women spread of their husbands? I've had my eyes fixed for some time on English life as the pictures are painted by Mrs. Henry Wood and other lady novelists, and on the whole the men come better out than the women."

"You'll believe anything but the truth. I'm very fond of man, but it's because of his depravity. Do you seriously think that women want saints for husbands? With all her cleverness, woman, Ko Tun Min, could never be wicked without the assistance of man."

"Then you think there's nothing to choose?"

"Let everybody choose for himself. All I know is that no decent woman would like to be a man."

It was hard work pulling up against the stream on the way to Thayetmyo, but it was the prettiest part of the whole river from Mandalay to the sea, and both Tun Min and Zeta often had their conversation interrupted for many moments, as going round a bend some new picture delighted their eyes with its freshness and wealth of colouring.

"Destiny has chosen for us all, and it is waste of time to be discussing which is the better off. Let's get back to Minkalé and Walworth. Supposing it's true that he's maimed the mingyi for life, will they put him in gaol?"

Zeta laughed a merry laugh.

"You are an oaf!" she said contemptuously, "to think that the mingyi's character isn't known well enough to keep Walworth out of gaol. But, of course, he'll be dismissed. Their list of unforgivable sins is much smaller than ours——"

"Naturally. They compiled the lists."

"Whoever compiled them, killing Commissioners wasn't bracketed with slaying pie dogs. I'm simply shaking all over thinking whatever poor Minkalé will do."

"She won't starve in body," said Tun Min, looking as a man always does, first and foremost at the financial side of misfortune.

"A woman's stomach is of much less concern to her than her heart. Poor thing, she will be heart-broken."

"When?"

"When he's either shipped home, or tied up in a lunatic asylum. I never open her letters till I've caught sight of the Pagoda and have recited my prayers, lest——"

"Lest what?"

"Lest I should hear something terrible that would shake me to my foundations. I'm sure I should leave Cruncher for a bit and go to her."

"It's strange, but my father, Ko MOUNG, the Bishop, and several friends of mine who write, never have hinted that anything was amiss with Minkalé. Ko MOUNG, in particular, would like to tickle my vanity by letting me know that she now preferred me to Walworth."

"They thought you were human, and didn't want to harrow your feelings: this is much more likely. But I wish you hadn't told me of that letter, and of Treble Bloo's fall out of a lofty window."

"You mean his involuntary and unorthodox exit."

"Don't be funny. There must have been something more serious at the back of it than just Walworth's muscles."

At Thayetmyo the steamer tied up for a few minutes, while the passengers got off, and the cargo, consisting chiefly of cases of kerosine or of cotton goods, was hastily put ashore.

"Would you like to go ashore?" asked Tun Min, knowing perfectly well they were safer from criticism where they were.

"No," said Zeta, watching the process of unmooring, as the boat hauled out on its anchor, which it weighed while the skipper shouted his last farewells to the

local agent, promising to be in better time next day if the current was not so strong.

"I'm still thinking of Minkalé," said Zeta, resuming her seat by the rail.

"Away in the back of your mind you think she might have been flirting with the mingyi Treble Bloo?"

"That alone would be nothing."

"Unless she was found out you mean?"

"Exactly. You see, Cruncher and Walworth don't take the same views of the same innocent pastime. Cruncher and I understand the sexes thoroughly, and a step or two more or less in the giddy dance of life——"

"Really helps to steady you?"

"Yes, if you like it so," said Zeta seriously. "But Walworth has other views."

"Original?"

"No; essentially masculine. He thinks that while he is privileged to flirt with all women, his wife may flirt with nobody."

"But why should it be necessary to flirt?"

"Ma Lé. Do you think I like my life as stale as yesterday's bread? Or as flat as bazaar soda?"

"But Cruncher sparkles?"

"Yes, but never with his wife."

"Is it bad form?"

"No, it is impossible."

"Why?"

"Husband and wife," said Zeta, with perhaps just the trace of a blush, "live very near each other—nearer, perhaps, than flirtation comes to—but what's

so nice in flirting is the nearness suggested as realizable."

Zeta had no intention of being wicked, but had merely meant to send up a *ballon d'essai* to see how the currents ran in the atmosphere of Tun Min's soul, and was intensely amused to find that he had taken her seriously.

"Silly boy," she said, while she shook with laughter, "broad phylacteries, as the nuns used to say, don't become young people nowadays."

"Really, Zeta, you alarm me sometimes. I think you said that Captain Cruncher regarded you as a wild bird."

"That explains why I'm here; but not as a depraved bird."

"I'm not easily shocked, but there's Prome in view, and I'm not sorry, but will you be met?"

Zeta was furious with Tun Min for having taken her literally, and she scourged him with her tongue, while his tears flowed, as only a Burmese girl can. But Prome was farther away than Tun Min had guessed, and there was time enough for the *entente* to be restored before they parted. Moreover, Zeta just as she stepped off the boat on to the narrow plank connecting up with the shore, made Tun Min promise that if Minkalé expressed a wish to see him, he would wait on her without delay. It was Cruncher that met her, and seeing Tun Min, guessed that they had taken the voyage with the intention of discussing Mr. and Mrs. Bubbles in private, and was not displeased.

"Is he still thirsting for the dew on Minkalé's lips?" he asked when he had got her home.

"Minkalé," said Zeta with warmth, "is well rid of a soulless crocodile like Ko Tun Min."

"What's he done?"

"Nothing. He's just a Nat in ice packing if he isn't a crocodile. I thought I should have moved him to tears with a moving picture I drew of Minkalé's sad life, but nothing ever stirs him now."

"Is there anything new?"

"Only that Walworth has flung Treble Bloo out of his house like a bad nib, and as you often say, there'll be the devil to pay."

"There'll be nothing so damned silly! Walworth has earned the gratitude of the entire Commission, and I'll bet you they drink his health to-night at the Pegu Club in 'bubbly.' So shall we."

Chinasammy put the wine on ice while Zeta had a cold bath to reduce a temperature which was still high after her explosion on board. Tun Min, on the other hand, while he washed and dressed for his humble dinner, congratulated himself on his escape, and decided there was more truth in biblical history than he had suspected.

CHAPTER III

THE light had gone out of Minkalé's life, but she believed it would return if she could but disabuse Walworth's mind of one or two illusions that it cherished. She had lost her first baby, a dear little thing with blue eyes and golden hair—and had for a time been laid low by the cruel blow; but, what she felt much more acutely was Walworth's frequent withdrawal from the outside world to the impenetrable vaults of his own soul, where he communed with himself, and if he occasionally gave her a glimpse of the current of his thoughts, it depressed her still further, for it told her that it was their "marriage" over which he was brooding. There were times, alas! only too few, when he was warmly affectionate, and inspired the hope that he had corrected the false deductions he drew from his union with a Burmese girl, but almost as soon the hope was dashed to the ground by his declaration that he deserved dismissal for having lowered the prestige of his service, for having desecrated the body of his mistress, and for having robbed a subordinate of his betrothed. On those occasions he permitted discussion, but was unconvinced by Minkalé's dialectic.

"You don't charge a man with theft," she once argued, "unless the owner of the stolen goods lays an information?"

"That is so," said Walworth, without suspecting that Minkalé had begun to bombard a position which had assailable corners in its fortifications. "Has anybody laid an information against you? I am the owner of the stolen goods as you call them, and am delighted at the theft; indeed, if you look into definitions in that unbound volume, I aided and abetted the theft. You're a child, and don't understand."

"On the contrary, I'm a woman, and my brain was never clearer. I think I can remember a time when my prattle was not displeasing to my critical hubby."

"If you're satisfied, Minkalé, it's because your inward eyes have been dazzled by the greatness of my position. You think you've married a rajah, and you picture yourself as a ranee wearing a jewelled crown. For that deceit I alone am responsible. And I cannot think that my conduct has been honourable."

"I'm very well satisfied," said Minkalé, putting her arm round his neck and giving him a kiss, "and of my satisfaction I am the best judge. We all like a little gilt on our ginger-bread. There are harmless illusions which we all cherish, and life would be an unholy tragedy if we thought and felt with Euclid's exactness and coldness. I do think myself a queen, and very often feel myself one; but I should be much more royal if I could transfer some of the pictures

from my mind to yours. You are a king after a fashion, aren't you?"

"A miserable impostor, with his day of retribution when found out."

"What madness!"

"You're obsessed."

"No, it's you that are."

"Well, Minkalé, it isn't a nice subject to discuss; in fact, it's pretty brutal for a man at any time to tell his wife that their marriage was a mistake. But you know that I'm not thinking of myself; my first thought is my wife. You, dear girl that you are, have done your best to mitigate my regrets by trying to make me think that our marriage was made in heaven. But how about the second and third grounds for dissatisfaction?"

"What is the second? Let's have them one at a time."

"The service."

It is a platitude that the history of the civilized world for the last century and a half has no brighter pages than the annals of the Indian Civil and Military services. There are written in indelible characters the moral and spiritual greatness of England, quite as much as the genius of her sons for administration, whether as in Haileyburian days they came of aristocratic birth, or as in later years, were recruited from the professional classes; and when Walworth looked into the inner history of empire, with its lofty ideals, he began to feel that a sad retrogression had set in from the standards of the Napiers, the Lawrences, and the Havelocks, who really

stood as representative of what was best in English character.

"What about the service?"

"Just this, Minkalé, that if this sort of thing is allowed to go on any longer, it means the extinction of the Empire."

"We are certainly in fashion."

"But is it a good fashion? What impression does it make on the Burmese mind? What about the children who owe their existence to the fashion? You and I personally are as pleased as Punch——"

"That is all we need mind."

"Ah, no!" said Walworth, speaking with great earnestness. "In our private lives, if we have no children, we are entitled to please ourselves, but not in our official. Mind, when we go there's a legacy we leave to our successors, and the size and purity of that bequest are absolutely the net result of our official lives."

"I never regarded you," said Minkalé in jest, though it wasn't a time for levity, "as an orthodox Buddhist. Fancy that!"

"Gautama was not an Imperial ruler, was he?"

"He was a jungle parrot, who thought much more than he said."

"Well, he left a very complete Imperial religion—that is, in its suggestion that men and women in responsible places have individualities to impress on the eternal screens of the future, and should be guided by the necessities of posterity rather than by their own instinct for enjoyment."

"Is it a necessity of posterity," asked Minkalé, with

some acerbity, "that you and I should make ourselves miserable? By the way, your religion has produced many remarkable men, hasn't it?"

"You mean the Christian religion. Oh yes, saints galore!"

"But it preaches a doctrine that appeals to my Buddhist mind."

"Which one?"

"That 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Mind you, your Empire was made by men to whom that principle appealed as an axiom."

"Nothing of the kind, Minkalé. They had more sense. Do you think they didn't order their next day's dinner? They not only did that, but they insured their lives and wanted no teaching that a pension with, or without, off-reckonings was a thing of beauty and a joy—while they lived. The maxims of Christianity were never intended to be Catholic. The Bible speaks to many nations, and has to humour not only national sentiment, but very often the fads of fanatics; and it doesn't do to pick out a saying here and there, and say it is the rock on which our Imperial greatness is founded."

"In other words," said Minkalé quickly, "religion and religious sentiment have nothing whatever to do with a nation's greatness."

"On the contrary, it is very often the direct cause of national decay. Look at Spain, Portugal, and, rather nearer home, our own Ireland."

"Then what on earth are we talking and differing about?"

"About the lofty ideals of Empire builders."

“ And how do we sin against them ? ”

“ As a conquering race,” said Walworth, speaking with more sincerity than discretion, “ we do not keep our self-respect, neither do you yours, if we mingle the races.”

Minkalé, like all Burmans, had a great pride of race, and, stung by Walworth's taunt, her first impulse was to get up and leave him for good; but she was really in love with him, and a woman's love will stand the strain of contemptuous reference to her state of subjection.

“ If a man had said that to you, you'd have called him a damned snob, and have held him out of the window till he apologized.”

Walworth jumped. It was the hottest breath that Minkalé had as yet blown on his pink and white cheeks, and he was scorched.

“ We're all snobs if you look us through and through,” said Walworth, composing himself again.

“ Now we've got it,” said Minkalé, looking really pleased, “ that the sin we've committed is against the snobbery of national sentiments. Is that not so ? ”

“ Strictly speaking that is so, but I'm not altogether sure that snobbery is quite the right word.”

“ You can't suggest a better, dearest, and though you know the hollowness of its pretensions, you are prepared to wreck your life and mine for them.”

Minkalé wept, and Walworth took her in his arms and kissed her.

“ Now that we've begun,” said Minkalé, letting her

husband dry her tears, "let us finish the argument.
"It's no use niggling at it."

"Well!"

"What of the third ground?"

"Ko Tun Min!"

"What, that little squirt of a myook—or rather wundauk as he is now! You don't think he cares very much, do you? Rot! He only used us as a lever for raising himself to what at his age is a giddy height indeed. And you needn't have much sympathy for him."

"Why?"

"To begin with, look at the artful, fraudulent game to which he made me a party for his own ends, and then, secondly——"

"What? Anything worse than that?"

"I'm not sure that it's altogether correct even by the advanced standards of you gay and thoughtless English people, but Zeta and he are rather fond of eating the air between Prome and Thayetmyo on those large steamers, and you know there are quite a number of cabins."

"That's scandal," said Walworth reprovingly. "That young monk is a bit of a Lothario, is he? Well, he'll get the jolliest slippering he ever had if he tries those larks on with Zeta."

"Captain Cruncher will never know. He's always tight."

"Cruncher's got so many strings to his bow that he'd never mind. In fact, he thinks it time for a new tonic, and his scouts are out in Maubin and at Myanounng looking out for Theta and Fie. No! I

was thinking of Zeta, whom I regard as a downright good girl. Mind you, I know—I've flirted with her."

"You have, but you don't know."

"Anyhow, it was the monk of whom we were talking, and I was assured that he left the kyoung for you and you alone. His passion consumed him."

"Really," said Minkalé, disgusted, "we're a nation of liars! He will be enormously wealthy when his father dies, and it occurred to my intriguing parents that it would be a capital thing for their only daughter if they could persuade Ko MOUNG's only son to abandon his robes and marry her. Day after day messages were sent to him that I was languishing for his love, and I am not unbeautiful, am I? He saw, and was conquered."

"There, you've given yourself away!"

"But it wasn't love as you and I know it, dear, that drew him to me."

"Then what was it?"

"It was love's cheat—lust masquerading as love. Tell me, which is a commoner foundation for marriage?"

"We misjudge a lot of people," he said, afraid of the introspection suggested by the question.

"Don't tell me that! Both you and I know the human heart sufficiently to know that most women marry for love and most men for the other thing. Don't let Ko Tun Min come between us."

"I've tried, and I wish I couldn't."

"You shall hear it from his own mouth. That boy

has a lot of pluck, and if I write to him he'll come and bravely acknowledge that he doesn't and never did care two flips of the fingers for the contemptible Minkalé. Shall I write?"

"Certainly. It would be a great relief to me to know that your memory was not a scorching blister on his soul."

Minkalé lost not a single moment, and went to her own little writing-table in the side veranda upstairs to indite the letter which Tun Min received just at the conclusion of the Babu's case; and while she was away no less a personage arrived than Treble Bloo, who always made it a point of approaching a house noiselessly in order that he might study the private habits of his hosts. A purda blown to and fro by the wind showed him that Walworth was in his study alone, and, looking up into the veranda, he saw Minkalé equally busy at another green baize table.

"They have quarrelled," he inferred, and at once deciding to comfort the lady, walked up the stairs unannounced as though the house were his own.

Minkalé was startled at his greeting, and screamed before she recognized who it was, which meant that Walworth hastily left his files to see what had alarmed his wife. When he found what the shock had been occasioned by, he stood amazed, looking at Treble Bloo, suggesting by his expression not only a question as to the trespasser's right to a chair, but as to his elementary right to exist.

"Don't mind me, Walworth," said the Commissioner

with a sang-froid quite unaffected. "I'm not inspecting you this time. I've come for a friendly chat with Minkalé. You can resume your studies—I mean your cases. I forgot you'd passed."

"Look here, Mr. Treble Bloo," said Walworth, shaking from head to foot with very natural anger, "have you ever fallen twenty-two feet in a blue-and-black puddle?"

"He isn't tight, is he, Minkalé?" asked the Commissioner, the colour mounting to his cheeks as quickly as it left Minkalé's.

"You can answer that question," said Walworth, "in two ways. One by running down the stairs at top speed and——"

"I never ran in my life," said the Commissioner defiantly.

"The only other way is on your nose in the puddle," said Walworth, lifting the outraged and protesting Commissioner by his collar and the seat of his overalls and ejecting him right over the veranda rails.

Minkalé, woman-like, fainted, but native servants are born for any emergency, and when they had recovered from the momentary shock of seeing Imperialism spread in the dirt after a flight of two-and-twenty perpendicular feet, they quickly attended to the Commissioner's wants, while urgent messengers were despatched for Blandish, the new Deputy Commissioner, and the Parsi doctor. But Walworth devoted all his time to his hysterical wife, whose condition was such as to suggest that though it was Treble Bloo that had fallen it was she that was hurt.

The Commissioner's injuries were without doubt serious, and when Blandish had left him at the circuit-house in the doctor's charge he walked over to Walworth's to ask how it had happened.

"I threw the swine out," said Walworth crisply.

"But, damn it!" said Blandish, looking astonished, "you can throw about a good deal from paper-weights to myooks, but you can't jolt a Commissioner's liver like that."

"He asked for it."

"How? You know I've got to report it."

"You can do it in a dozen lines. That lewd rascal has simply haunted this house ever since Minkalé came in. Why, God alone knows. For you could see she wasn't on for any fun but my own."

"He's had it in the neck before," said Blandish, "and this will finish him if your muscles haven't. Paniwalla, who's examined him, says he may recover, but never from the shock."

"Shall I be broke?"

"Good God, no! See what a block there'd be in promotion with a junior like Treble Bloo in a commissionship. But if you want to keep your hand in, keep an eye on a few of those soldier Commissioners—those are the blighters who keep our pay from being raised."

"India Office inexorable?"

"Quite. Of course you'll be transferred to suffer an orthodox punishment, but that's all bunkum. They'll give you a better station, and morally you'll feel patted on the back. Ta-ta!"

Blandish was right in the view that was taken and

also in the punishment that was prescribed for the outraged Wundauk Min.

Walworth was posted to Prome publicly, but he received a private suggestion that it was undesirable that his connection with Minkalé should continue.

CHAPTER IV

BINDASERY bathed by the well, and while he bathed it was his daily habit to hold a levée. His reputation as a fortune-teller stood high, but what stood higher still was the respect in which he was held for his ripe knowledge of legal procedure. He had once held office as a process-server to the Pegu courts, and had himself drunk deeply at the spring of litigation; but his erring judgment had at an unfortunate moment when money was tight raised the tariff of process-service to prohibitive heights, and that was his undoing. Now he was a humble orderly running errands, or gathering the balls at tennis, or dozing outside his master's study; but he never abandoned the hope that some day when his star once more shone in the ascendant he would be allowed to resume the sash and wallet of a summons peon. If only Walworth was transferred, he felt his good luck would return, and now that his enemy had gone he rejoiced, and it pleased him to receive the congratulations of his friends.

"Now," said Bimli, the court sweeper, sitting at quite a respectable distance, for when rinsing his mouth Bindasery had been known to squirt a dozen feet, "not only will your stomach but your pockets be full."

"I'm mixing a little ghee with my dhall for breakfast," said Bindasery, wringing out the cloth in which he had bathed, "and now it will taste like the butter of Dinapore."

"Everything," said Suddhu, the water-carrier, "will taste and smell better now that the bhoot shytan has gone. Even the birds are singing, and I declare that the plantain-tree by the stables will bear."

"His breath was a blight," said Bimli, breaking up a stick of tobacco preparatory to a chew.

"The Burmans," said Bindasery, "called him the Kya Woon."

"If that's a term of abuse," said Suddhu, "I vow I can beat it right off."

"It means a tiger judge," said Bindasery, "and is sometimes a compliment."

Both Bimli and Suddhu smiled at the delicate sarcasm.

"Well, anyhow," said Bimli, "he's done for himself this time, hasn't he? You can't throw Commissioners about like brick-bats. You know, Bindasery, what the white men's habits are."

"Don't I just, and there's no forgetting them when I want to sit down. But, Bimli, I forgave the Wundauk much for the 'putkun' he gave the Commissioner. I've seen snipe and quail fall to the gun, and once at a rajah's wedding when they threw largesses from the window I thought I had never seen a prettier sight. But the falling of the Commissioner saheb was that of a star."

"And what a puddle he fell into! How he will

smell!" said Suddhu, laughing till his puggaree rolled off.

"But it won't do the Wundauk any harm," said Bindasery with assurance.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" said Bindasery with indignation. "The law of mine and thine is the same in the house of a saheb as in the courts of the Queen. And Ma Minkalé was much too valuable a jewel to be burgled without a protest from her owner."

"They are devils for women—these sahebs!" said Suddhu, taking his turn at the well while Bindasery spread his cloth out to dry.

"God in heaven!" said Bindasery, who had but few morals, and even those were unknown to his friends. "Whatever were women made for? It is their destiny. And I know none better; but in a country like this where they do not veil their faces they get out of their depth."

"And drown?"

"That wouldn't matter, but it's the good men they drag down with them."

"How's that?"

"You are still a young man," said Bindasery, "and will see Ma Minkalé again. When she's got her hand in, it'll be into bangles that the Wundauk didn't buy. And her ears and neck will be a study in diamonds and pearls that her husband won't know the origin of."

"But that is so everywhere," said Bimli, to whom bribery was an elementary necessity.

"That," said Bindasery crisply, "I know to be a

lie. I have served under Commissioners, and Magistrates, and Police Superintendents in places where gram was cheap and where it was dear, but never did they take a handful which wasn't paid for. The saheb will never take a bribe whether he is serving on this or on the other side of the 'black water,' but here, where the memsahab is a Burmese girl, things are rather different."

Bindasery was right. It would be unjust and a wicked libel to suggest that in every case where these unfortunate sexual alliances exist the door is open to bribery and corruption, but it would be true to predicate it of a great many, and if there were no other objection to the mingling of the races there would at any rate be the one that it brought the pure name of British rule very often into undeserved and evil repute.

"That I know to be true," said Suddhu, "for I, too, have toured with several castes of saheb log, and they never took a thing but paid for it. It wasn't the same though, with their staff, and in a country like Burma the Burmese girl is as much on the Wundauk's staff as his cook and sweeper."

"Does she have the courage to take the tip direct," asked Bimli, who knew perfectly well the aroma of a tip.

"Mahadeo! No," said Bindasery. "Not, at any rate, till she's expert. Moun Ba Shin was just getting ready to sit at home like a hen on eggs when the Wundauk was transferred."

"That was the plan, was it? He was to take the tip and hand it on to Ma Minkalé."

"Cunning fellow," said Bindasery approvingly. "That gave him his own chance as well. Minkalé's simple mind would never have understood the doctrine of discounts, but she would have been contented with her share."

"At Prome she'll miss the co-operation of her father."

"She can have that of the Bench Clerk instead; but in that there is danger—those thieves sometimes fall out as father and daughter never can," said Bindasery, not without professorial knowledge of the dark lane of finance.

"I think she'll be rather nervous," said Suddhu, "as she's dead out of favour with the Wundauk, and if he catches her there'll be no hushing up."

"No young and characterless wench will ever be out of favour with the Wundauk," said Bindasery. "But what's wrong at the present moment with him is his head and not his heart. You know those Pathans in the military police? It is the same with them. They're not very fond of each other when at home, but here it is murder or nothing with them."

"I was talking to the saya," said Bimli, who knew a lot about doctors, "and he said the Englishman's head, which is fine enough here, was better and stronger in his own country. Here the heat and the mildew settle on his brain and boot equally, and that's what's the matter with him. You fellows don't know what I do."

"Then," said Bindasery, taking the hooka from Suddhu, "it can't be worth a kana cowrie."

"There's little that misses Bindasery," said Bimli, feeling annoyed, "who sits behind chicks, or with his ear on the speaker's neck; but I, too, hear a little sometimes, and it's hard to keep it in my own bosom like a ten-rupee currency note."

"It's worth more than that, is it?"

"Just this—that when Ma Minkalé said good-bye to her mother she said she would soon be back."

"Naturally," said Bindasery, looking disappointed. "For she looks as if she felt the want of some rest."

"But her mother," continued Bimli, "said she hoped that the Wundauk's love would return, and that Minkalé would like Prome better than Pegu."

One native always knows when another native is telling the truth without cross-examination, as if by instinct, and both Bindasery and Suddhu believed Bimli, but the former was puzzled to know what the cause of the Wundauk's coolness was, as he had never noticed it.

"I thought," said Bindasery, "that he treated her as other sahebs do their memsahebs—never wanting them while they had work to do, and the Wundauk was a glutton for work quite as much as for curries."

"We beat our wives," said Suddhu, "but he was never even cross with her. Still, when the baby was born he took no interest in it. You and I would have run into debt celebrating its birth."

"I remember," said Bindasery, looking very disgusted, "that he celebrated its death instead. He and the Deputy Commissioner saheb had drinks when they got back from the cemetery, while the mother

wept and had no one to comfort her but that old hag Ma May."

"A mother's love is sweet, but that of a husband is sweeter," said Suddhu.

"The fact of it is," said Bindasery, "that his natural appetite is returning. It is a way with these Englishmen that when they come out they try the food of the country and really like it; but that's only while the novelty lasts. In some cases it lasts much shorter than in others. Now with Cruncher saheb it will never alter, but the Wundauk must be better bred. He has got ashamed sooner."

"They are never ashamed," said Bimli, "till the Commissioner's memsaheb comes round, and then, my God! isn't there a scurry? Out went Ma Minkalé, and the Wundauk passed her in the street without removing his hat."

"He then dined in a black suit," said Bindasery, "and when he called me names I was a 'stupid idiot.'"

"Instead of what?"

"I shall not defile my mouth."

"Well," said Suddhu, who had been lost in thought with his eyes shut, "I wonder what their end will be. As a rule it's the girl that fares worst."

"I have examined their hands, and, believe me, Bimli, though yours are dirty with sweeping, you'd never dream of exchanging them for either of theirs. Or, for that matter, for the myook's. You remember Moug Tun Min, the milk-and-water monk?"

"Yes. What about their hands?"

"They all die young, and all about the same time,

and there must have been the most malignant forces at work to have brought the Wundauk thousands of miles to be beaten by a woman on the same stone as the myook—and indeed together.”

“Is Minkalé the beater?”

“Who else?”

“Well, she polished the myook off, and what happened—he was promoted. If she beats the Wundauk equally hard she’ll make a Commissioner of him before his turn.”

“Nothing can save them,” said Bindasery, spitting as he generally did when he was moved. “But I did not think that the end was so near.”

“What makes you think it now?”

“The tigress is in the pen with the lambs—they are all in Prome.”

“But they were all here, Bindasery,” said Suddhu, unconvinced, “and they’ve come to no harm.”

“When the mango is ripe it will fall. When the Wundauk’s cup is full he will drink it and die.”

“Betting,” said Bimli, feeling in his pocket for a four-anna bit, “is not legal, but sometimes it is lucky. Let’s have four annas on.”

“Make it a rupee,” said Bindasery, who never passed a whole day without winning or losing a wager.

“Right! Prophesy, and I’ll give you a month before I rub your nose in the dirt for a liar.”

“Give me my lota,” said Bindasery, and Suddhu handed him his brass pot which shone brighter than burnished gold. Bindasery held it up to his face, and for several moments seemed absorbed in the

admiration of his own features, but he at length put the lota down, and, clearing his throat, spoke in the tone of a man who had visited the valley of the shadow of death and was shaken in body and soul.

“ You want to know what I saw ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ There was no blood—not a speck.”

“ Ah ! ”

“ Wait a bit. But, my God ! how ever many funerals ? I counted four, and I stopped. Don’t hurry me. One was a Christian’s, for Cruncher saheb was reading the service ; the others were not so clear, but there were hpoongyis in abundance, and there was all the ghastly tumasha that accompanies the cremation of a monk.”

“ Nothing clearer ? ”

“ I tell you they will all be dead in a month, and forgotten in less than two.”

“ The bargain holds. We shall see.”

CHAPTER V

In those days Government House, in Rangoon, was a teakwood shanty standing in a park that was more or less of a jungle; but its kindly hospitalities were dispensed by an officer of the type that the Empire is famous for having produced, for he was a born ruler of men, infecting others with his own strong sense of duty, and in a long service had never been known to have failed to uphold what is best in the traditions of English public life. Sir Summer Lyte-Ning was an Etonian of the pre-Mutiny days, when the Company's college at Haileybury was still the preparatory school of the Indian Civil Service, but in his subsequent contact with the modern civilian there was never exhibited the smallest symptom of "side," though he doubtless shared the sympathies of his caste and their foreboding that the democratization of the service might be good for its members, but not for the Empire at large. That his fears were to a large extent unrealized no one confessed with greater frankness than himself; but it was in matters like Walworth's that he saw dangers which, if unattended to, might culminate in the total discrediting of British rule, and he decided to bring his virtuous hand down hard on an immoral custom that was condoned as mitigating life in the

tropics. He sent for Walworth, but though he was clear and persuasive, there was no tone of harshness in the interview.

"I wanted to see you, Bubbles," said Sir Summer, shaking hands, "on a delicate matter touching the relations that exist between the younger generation of Englishmen and the ladies of the country. You don't mind, do you, if I speak my mind rather freely?"

"Not a bit, sir. In fact——"

"That's all right. I'm sure your own strong common sense will show you how unwise such relations are—from every possible point of view. It isn't good for the service, for the lady, for yourself, and as for the children it's simply diabolical. Then we're a Christian nation, and there's no part of the Empire where our missionaries are so held up as here, where whatever a white man unpacks when he opens his portmanteau it isn't sexual morality. You had a missionary at Pegu?"

"I never met him, but he's there. I hear so."

"Don't laugh, but his society has spent a fortune on the country, and it has made three converts. They work out at thirty-three thousand pounds a piece! Pretty expensive when you feel that one or two of them might lapse. But quite apart from the religious aspect, it is a grave concern, and I have decided that these rashly-made connections shall cease."

"You have my willing co-operation, sir, but the difficulty is how to begin."

"You surely haven't a large family like Cruncher?"

"Oh no. But the lady's views on the proposed dissolution of partnership don't agree with my own."

" I understand it's only a question of money."

" Not with her. Her people are enormously wealthy. In her case it was ambition, and at moments it looks to me like the breach of an honourable contract to turn her out ; in fact, worse than that, for I can never put her in the position in which she was."

" But you agree as to the necessity ?"

" Certainly."

" The hard cases of individuals cannot prevail over the general good—that's one of the curses of all government. You can assure Mrs. Bubbles that she has my deepest sympathy, and it'll be a great privilege if I'm allowed in any humble way to mitigate her suffering, but for the good of the service she must regard you in future as nothing more than a friend."

" I see no way unless I leave the house, and that would appear rather like desertion. How would desertion, sir, in the circumstances appear to the impressionable Burman ?"

" Believe me, he wouldn't care a damn. He hasn't a single moral susceptibility, and even for an Eastern latitudinarian is a prodigy. There's no country in the world where you can be married at chota hazri and divorced before breakfast but Burma, and your separation from Mrs. Bubbles would be merely regarded as due to some sudden dislike. Possibly to the discovery of some latent defect, and, my dear Bubbles, women can be clever in concealing such a thing."

" It's a great comfort to me to know that I should not be held in contempt for what I myself at times think rather a shady thing."

" That's your singularity. But even the best

Governments have occasionally to do things which make them blush—and you are part of a Government that has never had a better.”

“ I have broached the subject to my girl, and am educating her up to the notion that a readjustment is to be desired.”

“ Just as I should have wished. It doesn't do to be brusque, and if it will soothe her feelings it is always in my power to satisfy the ambition of her male relatives. Has she a brother ?”

“ No.”

“ Father ? Yes. Well, possibly a K.S.M. would be a salve, and attending a durbar would raise the family to just the height they wanted to reach.”

“ I can't vouch for that, but I can promise that Minkalé and I will be nothing more than friends.”

“ Capital. Now about your own future.”

“ I'm perfectly content, thank you.”

“ Wouldn't you like to go to India ? There are few things so nice as the secretariat at Simla, unless it is the charge of a district; but you grow out of the latter. I got so fond of the Home Office that I should have been there now if they hadn't turned me out.”

“ I'm afraid just for the moment I have no ambition outside my own little hut, unless it is to return with a consciousness of failure to the refuge of failures.”

“ Where's that ?”

“ Oxford.”

“ Well, of course,” said Sir Summer, “ I did intend you to take my suggestion to heart seriously, but not so as to make you feel that you'd been a failure. Far

from it. Believe me, we have the highest opinion of your abilities."

Walworth left his Chief Commissioner after tiffin, feeling that there was something wrong somewhere, but exactly where he found it difficult to say. He knew that if he had been suspected as an official at home of keeping Mary Anne, he would not have been hospitably received in the house of his chief and offered promotion in Her Majesty's service. But Mary Ann and Minkalé were very different persons, and the consequences that followed the seduction of the former in no way resembled those that flowed from the ruin of the latter. Yet Minkalé was, in his view, a much higher creation than Mary Ann. This was not the first time that the problem had vexed his soul, but he had certainly never before had it presented to his mind with such force; and when he mentioned his possible return to Oxford as a tattered and torn wreck of Imperialism, he was giving expression to an idea that had certainly driven its roots deeper even than he had suspected. He was, in fact, beginning to be disgusted with everything and everybody, including himself, and that is notoriously a time when one's *alma mater* appears to offer the only haven where the troubled are at rest.

He had arranged to call for Minkalé at the house of Monsieur le Blanc in Voyle Road, and it was there that he drove. Monsieur had been a *persona grata* at Theebaw's Court at a time when the British representative was not only out of favour, but the recipient of many tokens of the King's ill-will, and it seemed natural, therefore, for Minkalé's parents to have culti-

vated the Frenchman's society. Anyhow, the old friendship had survived the metamorphosis of Mandalay into an Imperial city, and both Monsieur and Madame gave Minkalé a very cordial welcome. They had somehow come to hear that Walworth and Minkalé were not hitting it off, and were grieved, and Monsieur in particular resolved that he would restore the *entente* with the diplomatic skill for which he had come to be known at an Oriental Court.

But Walworth regarded the barest reference to the matter as an impertinence, and the assaults of diplomacy were like the play of a popgun on the walls of a fortress, and, indeed, of about equal effect. Minkalé seemed loth to say good-bye, but on a hint from Walworth she rose, and was kissed by Madame on both cheeks as she said farewell. In any other mood Walworth would never have given the incident a second thought, but just then he was at concert-pitch, and the lightest touch produced the fullest tones of a soul that was over-strung.

"No English woman," he said to himself, "would have demeaned herself by kissing a black woman. And yet why demeaned?"

Minkalé was busy with her own thoughts on the drive to the hotel, so that nothing interrupted the current of Walworth's speculations on racial likes and dislikes.

"Minkalé was right when she boiled things down to the snobbery of English sentiment," he reflected, "and is it a right feeling to give into when it's a question of our happiness or misery?"

He cast his mental eye back over the short years

of his own experience in the country, and he saw the servile mark of respect known as the "shiko" insisted on by the official and unofficial European alike; he saw myooks who were magistrates sitting on a mat at his door; he remembered the ex-Ministers of Theebaw lounging in the Deputy Commissioner's veranda at Mandalay while the latter was developing his negatives; and he had himself put to sundry club uses the royal palace, of which scarce a single room or hall was roped off from the vandal of Imperial invasion. Then he asked himself: "Were there not Princesses and Princes who were pensioners on pittances, and had once a month to prove their existence to the district officials by whom the pensions were disbursed?"

"It's perfectly damnable!" he said aloud; and, putting his arm round Minkalé, kissed her in the gharry, while a landaulette of English ladies drove past him in a whirl of gay laughter.

Minkalé was delighted, but she was afraid that it was only another of Walworth's many and inconsistent moods, but she reciprocated with a prayer that this mood, at any rate, might last.

"Was the Chief civil?" she asked, fearing that the reply might be anything but what she would like to know.

"He asked after you."

"Ma Lé! Whatever for?"

"As to whether you had any brother that he could be of service to. He has a kind heart, and, looking about for worthy *decorés*, put Moung Ba Shin down for a K.S.M. without any suggestion from me."

Minkalé's intuitive mind jumped at once to the

truth that it was intended to let her down gently, and the cloud that was beginning to lift from her mind resettled.

There was time, and as Minkalé specially wished it, they drove to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, then concealing its noble proportions within some bamboo scaffolding while the ravages of air and water were being repaired with golden hands. Walworth himself was not deeply interested in religion, but he helped Minkalé as they mounted the worn and dirty steps to buy a bundle of tapers, which he let her light at her favourite shrine while he strolled round the edifice and examined the various representations of Gautama, always cold and contemplative. Men and women knelt and their lips moved, but what was it they said ?

“ They are a damned rum people,” he said to himself. “ There isn’t even the little finger of a god in their worship, and yet they pray !”

What they did, in fact, engage in was not so much prayer as the recital of precepts in which the cardinal virtues are for ever embalmed, and the contemplation of which is believed to be of great moral efficacy. That was all that held Minkalé as Walworth, passing a blind man playing on his harmonicon, approached a favourite but at that time neglected spot—favourite with Englishmen alone, for it was there that many of the heroes of 1852 were buried, but not forgotten. He stood rooted to the spot, and his active mind wondered whether it was right to make a Christian sepulchre of a Buddhist Holy of Holies, but the only answer he could think of was that “ it was of a piece

with our damned snobbery." Walworth's indignation at the burial of his countrymen on the Pagoda platform is very commonly shared by globe-trotters, but there is no foundation for it in the Buddhist heart and mind.

Minkalé's devotions ended, she made the usual purchases of curios, not for herself, but on the off-chance that Walworth might like to send his mother specimens of Burmese lacquer, and his little sisters the quaint dolls that are a tangle of strings and legs—or it may be arms.

The road home was by the royal waters of Dalhousie Park, famous for its profusion of flowers, for its well-cut and ever-green lawns, and, above all, for its views of the Shwe Dagon, as seen by day or by night, and Minkalé was touched by the quiet beauty of the scene.

"Did I feel within," she thought, "what Nature is without, then would I gladly build a thousand Shwe Dagon!"

Walworth's mind was far, far away. He was at the House, and in his memories of college found the lavender that can still sprinkle the wanderer's life, though he be discouraged and downcast by a sense of isolation in distant lands.

CHAPTER VI

WALWORTH'S house at Prome was an unsightly barn, situate in a hollow below the road facing the river, but Zeta, with her characteristic energy, had taken it in hand, and by the time the Wundauk Min arrived it was decently comfortable, if not exactly in appearance a gentleman's residence. Both Cruncher and Zeta were shocked at Minkalé's appearance. They had known her as a beautiful girl, full of girlish glee, and looking on life as made for enjoyment alone; but the Minkalé they now beheld was a silent and sorrowful woman, who had morally and spiritually grown old and grey in a single night, and whose expression was that of despair. Walworth, too, had lost the buoyancy of youth, and spoke the serious language of Commissioners who are accustomed to speak and not be spoken to.

"You look after Minkalé," said Cruncher, addressing Zeta, while he himself drove Walworth off to his study, where their privacy was not likely to be invaded, and where it was his intention to get to the bottom at once of the causes of a difference between Walworth and his wife which in his view threatened to be the ruin of both.

"I'm afraid," said Cruncher, making a modest

beginning, "that the climate's begun to get at you. It was the same with me, and I felt mildewed in body and soul; but the conclusion I came to was that if left to itself climate alone would never kill. It was its damned accomplices."

"Who?"

"Worry and bother."

"That's all very well, but when a fellow is in a moribund ward it isn't much good telling him he's sure to recover if he can feel himself cured."

"Imagination can be both a gift and a curse."

"Where there's room for it to move about. But with me it's the parallelogram of forces, and no amount of imagination will displace the resultant."

"I used to dabble in maths," said Cruncher, passing the tin box, which was a patent for keeping cigars dry, "and the subject of forces appeals to a soldier. Perhaps we can dodge them. I've done it many a time, when the resultant was a judgment summons."

"Well, of course, Minkalé is one."

"If that's all, you can put your head on your pillow—or on her pillow, for the matter of that—with an easy mind."

"I'm afraid I've got to give up that pillow."

"You're not such a damned fool!"

"I've pretty well told the Chief I will when it's expedient, or rather when Minkalé's got accustomed to an unpleasant notion."

"It was no business of the Chief's, and a damned impertinence!" said Cruncher angrily.

"I don't know, Cruncher, whether I'm not just at

present a pathetic study in psychology. I've been trying to get to the bottom of the reasons for objecting to the custom of the country."

"There are only the missionary's, and nobody cares a tinker's benediction nowadays for his mildewed principles."

"The fact that we're a Christian nation doesn't bother me a bit. What I want to know is why it's lowering the service for me to keep Minkalé. I thought so when I had an idea that the Burman thought less of me for it. But according to the Chief, the Burman has no morals at all. He's not shocked at the relationship or at the shadiness of its sudden termination. To him it's quite as unimportant as if I wear flannel next my skin or not. But still it matters a great deal to our Imperial prestige."

"Bunkum!"

"I've no patience with sophistry, but I've thought till my head ached over this problem, and come to a very comfortless provisional solution. Mind you, I could have understood it if it had been suggested that any lowering of moral standards was bad for me—that, in fact, I might go from bad to worse—but it's no question of morals at all."

"I expect he said it was damnation to Minkalé?"

"She's the best judge of that, and my qualms on that score have been removed. No; all the grounds are political."

"That's where the children come in."

"Yes; but that isn't all. The key to our Imperial greatness seems to lie in the fact that we keep a conquered race at arm's length."

"Good God! yes. You wouldn't think of drinking a peg with a Burman."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, he'd get tight, and be damnably familiar and offensive. You'd kill him without compunction."

"Still, we can be friendly."

"Not with a mountain, but with a wide river between us, for the rascal wants a lot of watching. But the Burman's subjection isn't a bit mitigated by his sister's appearance on my staff."

"No; it brutally emphasizes our racial contempt for him."

"How?"

"We tell him that his girls are good enough for our beds, but that he himself is a pariah who'd defile either our drawing-room sofas or our dining-room chairs."

"Walworth! Damn it, you don't want bugs and fleas in your house, and a black man belching garlic and onion in your face! Your notions of Empire are upside down."

"I cannot and will not believe that our Imperial greatness lies in cutting the Burman by day, while it's permissible to consort with his daughter by night; and if that's pure and undefiled Imperialism east of Suez, then Walworth Bubbles goes."

"My God! Goes where?"

"Back to a humbler life, but there's no humbug in it—to Oxford."

"And resign?"

"I've got my papers in my pocket. I brought

them with me, but thought I'd give you a chance of correcting my views, but you've only combated them with the sentiments of the old school of caste and colour. Will you forward this to the Commissioner? It's my resignation."

Cruncher tore the paper up without reading it, and flung it into his waste-paper basket.

"As I didn't read it, Walworth, I can't say what was in the document; but what I can promise is that you'll have all the opportunity you want to consider a very grave step before you take it. Now, how do you think your resignation will affect Minkalé?"

"If I stay out I shall be pointed out as a degenerate civilian—gone fanti; if I take her home, they'd get wind that she'd been my mistress; if I stay in the service, she goes out. The position is hopeless."

"All because of that meddlesome ass, Lyte-Ning!"

"One must keep step with one's chief—your military nature tells you that."

"While you've been talking, Walworth, I've been thinking, and it seems to me that it's sentiment in either case, and that you've no right to say that I'm wrong."

"That depends on the criterion, and if we don't agree as to that, then our differences are irreconcilable."

Cruncher had to assent to that.

"We were brought up in different schools," said Cruncher, losing hope that there was any prospect of agreement.

"Mine was, and is, the democratic school of Ripon and Ilbert."

"How sad!"

"And they got their marching orders right enough. They struck a blow for equality, and got it back with interest. So far, Cruncher, they have both survived the combat, but which do you think will live the longer?"

"Do you mean the Empire or the Ripon school? Good God! the damned school was spat on by every white man in India, and hustled out of practical politics, and here you are holding the fusty threadbare old thing up to the light again!"

"It'll come up again, and come up top. However, that is only a side-issue. The point is whether, with my opinions, I should go or stay?"

Farther down the same road, and in another house sat Minkalé and Zeta on the carpet of the former's sitting-room, just the picture of a conference in tears.

"It really began with our marriage," said Minkalé, going back to the very beginning, as she believed it to be. "Before ever we got to Mandalay on our honeymoon, he said he had ruined me; but I laughed his fears away, and he took a rosier view of an Anglo-Burman marriage. But then we went to the palace, and found thrones put to vulgar uses—in fact, had it been Cromwell, he couldn't have shown less respect for national feeling, and that went straight to Walworth's heart. He kept saying, if that was Imperialism, this was no country for him, and I was frightened; for if he left, where should I be?"

"But he could take you, dear, and in England they have broader views."

"That's what I thought; but he said I should be loathed as a leper in England for living with him before I was his legal wife."

"So that Burma didn't suit him, and England didn't suit you. What madness! And he is such a nice fellow! I had quite made up my mind, my dear, to run off with him myself when he fell in love with you."

"I thought so, too, once, but alas!"

"Oh, but this is only a freak, and it will pass," said Zeta, taking Minkalé's hand in her own lovingly.

"It will never pass," said Minkalé, breaking down. "I once thought it would when he had got into the usual groove, and perhaps he might; but——"

"But what, dearest?" said Zeta in alarm, feeling that some revelation was at hand.

"I'm never supposed to read his home letters, but he left one lying about that arrived by the mail yesterday, and it ended up 'with love, yours affectionately, May.' And the writer urged him to go home at once."

May was Walworth's sister-in-law, but Minkalé thought she must be his fiancée, and the suggestion roused a sleeping lioness in her bosom.

"It would have been bad enough," she continued, "had he been frank about it. We take that risk, for we know that in most cases an Englishman's love for his home takes him back, and he does not return alone. But the baseness of his deceit! He's a hypocrite, and I'm sure he's laughing in his sleeve at the way he's taken the unsophisticated Burmese girl in."

"I vow there's some mistake!"

"None! It's obvious he was betrothed to May when he treacherously slobbered me over with his professions of love. He now talks of resigning. Well, all I've got to say is he'd better get out of the country quick, or he'll never go."

"Minkalé dear, you're mad to talk like that!"

"Then it's the fault of my tongue, for my mind was never saner."

As Minkalé said this, her eyes shone and her cheeks flushed with a wild passion, and, seizing Zeta by the shoulders, she shook her violently, adding:

"My love has now turned to hate. From May to Minkalé, and from Minkalé to May, what was it but the path of lust and deceit?"

"Come, Minkalé, you mustn't talk like that."

"I can act much worse!"

"You've been a good deal alone, dear, and that's good for nobody. If I found that Cruncher was engaged, I just flirted with anybody that happened to be handy, and it kept all worry and brooding out of my mind. You must do the same thing, and you know Ko Tun Min is here?"

"He won't look at his creator now. I asked him to come and see me when I was in great distress, but he treated me like dirt."

"He's repented since."

"Has he?"

"Oh yes; he'll see you at any time."

"At any time! Where does he live?"

"You can see the house from your bedroom window."

"It's really a better one than ours," said Minkalé,

now looking at the ceiling of her own, and wondering when it would come down on the top of them all. "I expect Ko Tun Min is very swallowed up in his own conceit."

"No," said Zeta, noting with some relief that Minkalé's passion appeared to have passed; "nothing seems to warm his blood. I took him on the river the other day, and never felt it so chilly in my life."

"I was never very enthusiastic about him."

Zeta left Minkalé, as the latter had professed a desire to unpack and put all Walworth's things out for him before he returned from Cruncher's, and she was not a minute too soon, for he passed Zeta on the way.

"Who are you flirting with now?" he asked, but it was not in the old light and airy manner, with the usual merry laugh, and Zeta felt sad at the change that had come over both her friends.

"Walworth's raving!" said Cruncher, when he saw Zeta shaking the dust off her slippers.

"So is Minkalé, and it's a chorus I don't like."

"What do you suggest?"

"That I go and live with Minkalé, while you trot Walworth round the district and do a little shooting."

"He wants to resign, and I expect his papers must go through in the end; but he's promised to sleep on them for another night."

"Then it's his last," said Zeta, turning pale with fear.

"Why?"

"Minkalé is frightfully put out over a letter to

Walworth in which she has discovered that he was engaged to a girl at home just when he was honeymooning with her at Mandalay, and if the passion I saw her in returns, then anything might happen. She was demented, and when the Burmese blood is aflame, it loses all self-control."

"Walworth can look after himself, and she'd better be wary how she walks."

That night, before she went to bed, Zeta out of curiosity dropped in on Minkalé for a minute; but the latter had just gone to bed, and Walworth was dozing in his long armchair. They were all to have dined together, but both Walworth and Minkalé pleaded the tedious journey up as an excuse, and the dinner was postponed.

CHAPTER VII

WAS the fire-god in command when the forces of Nature were creating both Burma and Burman? The warm blood that courses through the veins of Burmese men and women has a complete analogue in the murky rivers of petroleum that flow in the bosom of their native land, and it cannot be said that the one is more inflammable than the other. A milk-and-water taunt, such as a suggestion that the person addressed is a "proud man," is practically certain in Burma to have a tragic ending; but the provocation Minkalé had received and imagined were much greater, and she retired to bed soon after dinner with her blood aflame in the fires of hate and revenge.

"I shan't be long when my pipe's out," said Walworth, as Minkalé climbed the hall stairs.

He threw himself into a long-sleeved chair, and once more let his hungry mind ruminate in Imperial pastures, but with a clearer vision and a feeling that Cruncher was not such a fool as he looked.

"Had my resignation gone in," he reflected, "it might have been irrevocable; but now I can think things out at my leisure, and perhaps find a suitable place for Minkalé in the scheme of Imperial politics."

The more he thought of it, the more convinced was

he that such objections as there were to the popular but immoral custom were due to the fact that Burmese girls had taken possession of the orchestra stalls, if not of the boxes, in the Imperial theatre, whereas they should have been contented with the pit, as in the early days of Clive and Hastings, when the "bibikhana" disclosed no secrets of the harem. He decided he would write to his Chief, and suggest a *modus vivendi*, which would be inoffensive alike to national sentiment and to the *amour propre* of officialism. There still remained the vexed question of the aloofness of the white man from the brown, and as to this he was not prepared to succumb to the superior experience of Cruncher; but there could be no doubt that the Empire was far from being an anæmic plant. On the contrary, nothing could have been more vigorous and flourishing, and Walworth began to feel a doubt whether his official predecessors in the long line of descent from John Company's Governors and Lieutenant-Governors had not understood and correctly gauged the distance at which a subject is appropriately ruled. He was, in fact, just at that time a not uncommon specimen of Oxford scholarship adrift on Imperial waters with old and obsolete adjuncts of navigation that had done well enough under Greek or Roman skies, but which were quite unsuited to the little surveyed bays and channels of Eastern thought and life. To such men the conviction that what is best only comes after a series of bumps, when their little craft is in danger of being swamped; and Walworth, as he dozed, himself felt that he had been perilously near shipwreck. But

further he was not prepared to yield, when a lizard, springing at a moth, came heavily down on his nose, and roused him to a sense of the hour and of his promise that he would not be long.

As he stole into the bedroom on tiptoe he saw that Minkalé had, with her usual thoughtfulness, placed a glass of iced water by his bed for him to sip when he awoke hot and thirsty during the night; and, throwing off his clothes hastily, assumed his pyjamas, and turned in with a notion that Minkalé was asleep after a trying journey and the still more trying jolt to her feelings from the threatened separation. But he thought he had a pleasant surprise in store for her in the morning, when he proposed to take her fully into his secrets, in the hope that she would see the necessity for taking a less prominent seat. With this hope to comfort him, Walworth was soon asleep and snoring loudly; while Minkalé was wide awake, with the fire of hate burning bright in her Burmese blood. As soon as she was sure of his condition, she rose, and, stepping gently, went straight for a blue bottle that stood on a ledge in the wall, from which Walworth had been in the habit of taking and using microscopic quantities when pariah dogs in his neighbourhood wanted poisoning. She took the bottle, and held it near her heart, as she looked at the youthful form of the man she had once loved, and for a moment she felt she could not do it. Not that she was frightened, or revolted from the criminal character of the deed, or that she was repulsed by its baseness; but just for that instant she recalled her old love for him, and she hesitated. It was only momentary though, for the next second she

pictured him kissing May in a passionate embrace, and a sense of her betrayal took possession of her with demoniacal fury. She advanced with quick but noiseless steps to the table on which the glass stood, and, removing the cork from the bottle, jerked in a dose that would have sufficed for a dozen murders.

"It is his cup of destiny," she thought as she walked hastily into the veranda, where she had placed a Penang chair from which she could see, without being seen, the success or failure of her devilish planning.

There she sat down, and, taking an envelope from her writing-table, secreted a crystal for her own destruction, and then rolled it in the waist of her lungyi.

"So it's this," she said sadly, as she threw her head back, "that rising and shining comes to. He and I were both impelled by the same motives—we rose and shone together. But there is a repentance in destiny, and she thought she would dash me from the heaven of my delight, and substitute another star in that firmament, but she shall not. A dethroned goddess I am—that I cannot help—but I shall pluck the crown from Walworth's brow, and at any rate we can perish together. Life was given for enjoyment, and disappointment, sorrow, and shame are its abuse. What remains of it to me is contemptible, and I lay it down without a pang. But where? Not here. At the feet of Ko Tun Min."

Minkalé smiled as she thought of giving him dead what she would not give him alive, and was not repelled by its ghastly irony.

Just then Walworth moved, and saying, "It's

damned hot!" seized the tumbler, and had all but finished its contents when he fell back dead.

Then for the first time the horror of the tragedy struck Minkalé's imagination with elemental force, and she shrieked, but there was nobody within ear-shot, and she found herself alone with death. A wild terror seized her, and she fled; but before she was out of the compound she was able to collect her thoughts, and, pausing for a second, she looked back on the dimly-lit bedroom, where she had left not only the corpse of her lover, but her own tempest-tossed and shipwrecked heart, and, waiving a melancholy farewell, she made for the track that led her to Tun Min's house.

Tun Min, a victim of insomnia, was pacing his veranda when he saw her form approach by the path that led past the well and the vegetable garden, and he wondered who it might be that was daring enough to think of stealing his tomatoes, when he recognized Minkalé, and was almost frozen with fear to the spot where he stood.

"Ma Lé!" he exclaimed, and was overheard by Minkalé, who was now transformed into a very different woman from the demon that had gloated over Walworth's approaching doom.

"I," she said, as she stood in his dining-room, "am a dying woman, and as a good Buddhist Ko Tun Min will not deny me admission."

He turned up the light, and all but fainted when he noted the ghastly change in the friend of his boyhood. He had known her young, beautiful, buoyant, and majestic, but a short while ago, when he hoped to

make her his bride, and now what stood and stooped before him was a scorched and withered shadow of that past.

Minkalé's hair hung down, but there was no longer any suggestion of wildness in her look. Though her pulse still beat, she had passed beyond the latitude where the emotions speak in the voices of joy or sorrow, for, indeed, it was at the gates of Death that she stood.

They looked at each other for some moments without either of them speaking, and then Minkalé sat lightly down on the mat by a chair on which she could lean an elbow.

"You will think it odd," she said, in a tone of perfect calm, but in a whisper that was weird and of the other world, "that I should come to die where I have refused to live; but, Ko Tun Min, I could not go forth without a word of explanation, without a prayer for forgiveness, without a suggestion for the future, and it will soothe my few remaining moments to know that you had the satisfaction of knowing not only that you were avenged, but that the hand was mine."

Tun Min was terrified. He had never seen anybody like this, and he wondered whether it was not his duty to let Walworth know where his wife was, and what was her condition; but it occurred to him that the Wundauk might have been suddenly called out. That Minkalé's words were intended to convey some disaster to Walworth never entered his mind, distracted as it was by the apparition that sat and whispered in a sepulchral voice.

"Shall I send for the Wundauk Min?" he asked.
"I'm afraid that Ma Minkalé is not very well."

"There is no one to send," said Minkalé, looking around her, "and there is no one to call. Walworth is *dead*!"

"Ma Lé!" exclaimed Tun Min, deeply moved.
"Someone must swing for it, and we must report the matter at once."

"No one shall swing for it, and it shall not be reported just yet. Give me a glass of water, and listen to my story, for I am weary and must go."

"Shall I mix a little whisky with it?" asked Tun Min, opening his cupboard.

Minkalé nodded, and the bottle clinked on the tumbler's mouth as Tun Min nervously poured out what even men would have regarded as a liberal peg.

"Thank you," said Minkalé, taking the glass.
"Now, let us begin at the beginning. Tell me, was Ko Tun Min ever really in love with me?"

"Yes."

"When a monk returns to manhood it isn't always for love, and I knew you had a consuming ambition. Such an ambition is natural to man; is it unnatural to women? Men brush aside impediments to their ascent, and mayn't women do the same? Don't tell me that climbing is a game with rules and referees, into which the leaven of English sport has entered. It wasn't very noble for me to have brushed you out of my path, but you'd have done the same with me."

"Never."

"That was what Ko Walworth was just about to do, anyhow. I admit there were more reasons than one in his case—his pre-engagement to May at home no longer interests me—and it does not touch my argument; but he was prepared to jettison me because of some flamboyant notion of respect to his service and his race. You see, men and women act from the same motives. But did Ko Tun Min really love Minkalé, and was he prepared to soar with her into the heavens?"

"Of course I was, and I am," sobbed Tun Min, who was now convulsed with grief.

"Can you forgive me?"

He took her in his arms, and for several seconds there was silence, broken only by the sob of a broken heart.

"Let us go to Walworth," he said, "and he will restore you to me."

"I thought you hadn't understood," said Minkalé, raising her head from his bosom, "and now you will regard me as a pestilent plague. I have killed Walworth, and if he had a soul it stands before his Maker."

At last the truth in all its hideous nakedness dawned on Ko Tun Min, and that he was harbouring a murderess who was none less than his own old sweetheart, for whom all his old love had returned, greatly agitated him. Minkalé saw his emotion, and she quietly slid off his knees on to the mat.

"Don't tell me you killed him!"

"I did," said Minkalé, without the least trace of feeling. "But do not be alarmed for my sake. I myself stand on what Christians call the brink of

eternity—possibly it is naikban—and shall soon be beyond the reach of judges and gaolers. There are just a few words more which I wish to say. You still want to rise and shine?”

Tun Min shook his head in a paroxysm of grief to indicate that he no longer had such an ambition.

“Extinguish the desire if it ever returns. Walworth and Cruncher discussed your future with brutal frankness. To them there was a lofty heaven for the white man alone, and quite another one much lower down—in fact, perilously near to their hell—which was reserved for the ‘subject’ races. That, Ko Tun Min, is not a firmament in which either you or I would care to rise and shine, and therefore I have chosen to set. My sun goes down. It is time, for its light has gone out.”

She loosened the waist of her lungyi, and calmly removed the envelope, from which she withdrew and swallowed the fatal dose before Tun Min could interfere. A mouthful of whisky and water prevented her from choking, and she lay back where she had sat in her dying agony.

Tun Min fell on her face and neck weeping, and called on her by name and kissed her lips, but Minkalé’s soul had fled. He walked the night through as one demented, pausing betimes and kneeling or prostrating himself before the corpse of his beloved, till he was found by Cruncher in the morning more mad than sane after a report made by Walworth’s servants of the latter’s death and of the disappearance of his wife. It appeared to Cruncher that there was no likelier place, in Prome for getting a clue as to Minkalé’s

whereabouts than Tun Min's house, but that he should find her dead in Tun Min's arms had never occurred to him. It was impossible for him to get a coherent explanation from the quondam myook, nor did Cruncher press for one just then; but when Zeta had taken Tun Min home with her, and had put together the disjointed fragments of his story, there was little to add to what Cruncher had correctly surmised.

Both Cruncher and Zeta were profoundly touched by the cruelty of a tragedy of which they had only just had the slenderest warning, and had dismissed from their respective minds with the contempt we keep for the voice of prophecy.

"I should never have thought such a thing possible, even in Burma," said Cruncher, who could talk of nothing else.

"That's where you're wrong," said Zeta. "Burma is the land of love, and therefore of hate. The murder naturally follows."

Minkalé's parents were overwhelmed with grief, and they took her body away to Pegu, where they gave her a funeral which for its sumptuousness had never been surpassed. The procession of offerings was more than a quarter of a mile in length, and among the gifts to the monks was more than the monkish mind could expect or desire. The cortège was characteristically Burmese in the gaiety of its colouring, in the barbarity of its national music, and in the total absence of mourning. In all the wealth of Eastern grandeur with which Minkalé was borne to her grave there was but one Western note, and that was the wreath which lay on her oblong coffin,

and bore the legend, "From a broken heart." The service at the graveside was simple, and consisted of a reading from the Pali texts on the worthlessness of life and the futility of human ambition. Tun Min knew the texts by heart, and as he heard the Bishop recite them in the old familiar voice he felt the repentance of a soul that is not yet lost, and he wept.

In Prome they buried the exile with the simplicity but with the eternal hope of the Christian service, and Walworth sleeps now in the corner of the cemetery where the padouk thrice in every year gilds his tomb with its golden tears, and whither Zeta never fails to repair on the anniversary of his death and lay the tribute of affectionate friendship.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Sayadaw had been busy with his secretary all day, discussing the proposals of the Education Department touching the standards of Pali tests; but he was now alone, and reclining on a mat spread on the floor of his kyoung, when Tun Min, dressed once more in the yellow robes of a monk, and his head shaven, approached and knelt at the feet of the master. For several moments neither spoke, nor could they have had they tried, for both were deeply moved. U Dharna loved his pupil, and had followed his magisterial career with affectionate interest, seeing in it the likelihood of great moral results to the nation, for it is by the rectitude of its public service that the public progress is accelerated; but the magistrate was again a monk, and the public career was closed for Tun Min, who had for ever turned his back on the Queen's service.

"There was a time when I could not persuade my son," said the Bishop, still lying prone, with one hand resting on his forehead, "to be a monk; now it would be equally futile for me to propose his return to Imperial office."

"That is so, my lord," said Tun Min, stooping forward, so that his head touched the floor.

"Welcome, my son—welcome. But tell me, does the past still live in the present?"

"The past of love," said Tun Min, now with his emotions under full control, "for a woman and the past of ambition to rise and shine are, my lord, dead, and buried in Ma Minkalé's grave."

"What is killed by disappointment," said the Bishop, "has no resurrection. But tell me, for the knots of the human heart are not unravelled in the dim light of a hpoongyi kyoung, why were you disappointed with your public office?"

"My career had come to a full stop."

"Indeed, no," said the Bishop, sitting up. "I had an audience of the Chief Commissioner only a month or two ago, and he asked me if I had any more Tun Mins to give him, and he spoke as though you had the ball at your feet, and could kick it where and as high as you liked."

"That, my lord," said Tun Min, unrepentant, "was a shallow pretence. The purple of office is dangled before the Burman's eye, and he is dazzled; but once seated on a myook's stool, he sees the higher offices in a light better adapted to his sight, and it is a true light."

"What was it you saw?"

"That the avarice of our rulers spares no morsel that has a flavour for the ruled."

"Is that why you resigned?"

"That is why I resigned."

"Then my son has acted hastily. Listen! You are the one survivor of a large family of nigh a dozen children?"

"I am, my lord."

"And infant mortality in our beloved land is high. The learned doctor says there is no country where it is higher."

"It is truly sad," said Tun Min, without suspecting what the good Bishop was leading up to.

"Is it not the child's food that is the cause? Rear a babe on milk, and he lives; stuff him with dories and with curries, and he dies. Babies do not thrive on the diet of adults. It is the same in the larger family of government as in the smaller Burmese household. I see you don't agree, but show me a Burman who has excelled in the higher arts of government. You cannot, for Mindoon Min is dead; and what was he?"

"He was King."

"He earned much merit, but there is no British Commissioner who is not ten thousand times better qualified to administer a charge."

"The capacity for ruling must naturally exist among a tribe, a race, or a people."

"Examine our history," said the Bishop with energy, "and, mind you, they who write history in the East do not dip their pens in the ink of failure overmuch. But what is our record? The meagre one of a kinwoon mingyi here and there, who could see farther ahead than the rest. That is on one side."

"And on the other?"

"The domination of ignorance, tyranny, lust, with their barbaric accompaniment of cruelty, spoliation, and murder. No, my son, a righteous and well-

ruled people do not pass into the servitude of the stranger."

"Are we babes beginning to walk?" asked Tun Min, with a faint suspicion of a smile playing on his lips.

"We are infants who want to run and jump before we can stand up without support. No, it cannot be. We should take the gifts of our governors with gratitude."

"They give nothing," said Tun Min dolefully, "unless it is with a kick."

"Even kicking," said the Bishop with a smile, "can be good discipline, whether it is the kick of misfortune on your head or of an unripe mangoe in your stomach."

"But the clout of bad manners," said Tun Min, unconvinced, "is not a discipline; it is a humiliation."

The Bishop looked at Tun Min with pity.

"Yes, my son, humiliation is a discipline, but at your age and with your rebellious, haughty disposition, I cannot say that it is misprescribed. It is a transient humour though, and in the kyoung it will pass in a night."

"I stay not in kyoungs, my lord."

"Are there other places meet for a hpoongyi?"

"The retreat of the eternal lord and master."

"In the chilly caves of mountains?"

"Aye."

"Go thou, with my benediction," said the Bishop, laying his hands on the bent head of his pupil, "into uninhabited hills and forests, and there learn from

prayer and fasting the hidden path that leads to the eternal temple of Pure Reason. On her sacrificial altars shalt thou see thine own offering—the unworthy tenement of thy soul that they call thy body. As the serpent sheddeth its skin, so shalt thou return to the manhood of the world with thine own manhood cast from thee, as did Gautama the divine. May the teachings of the immortal master be thy Light and thy Comfort. Farewell.”

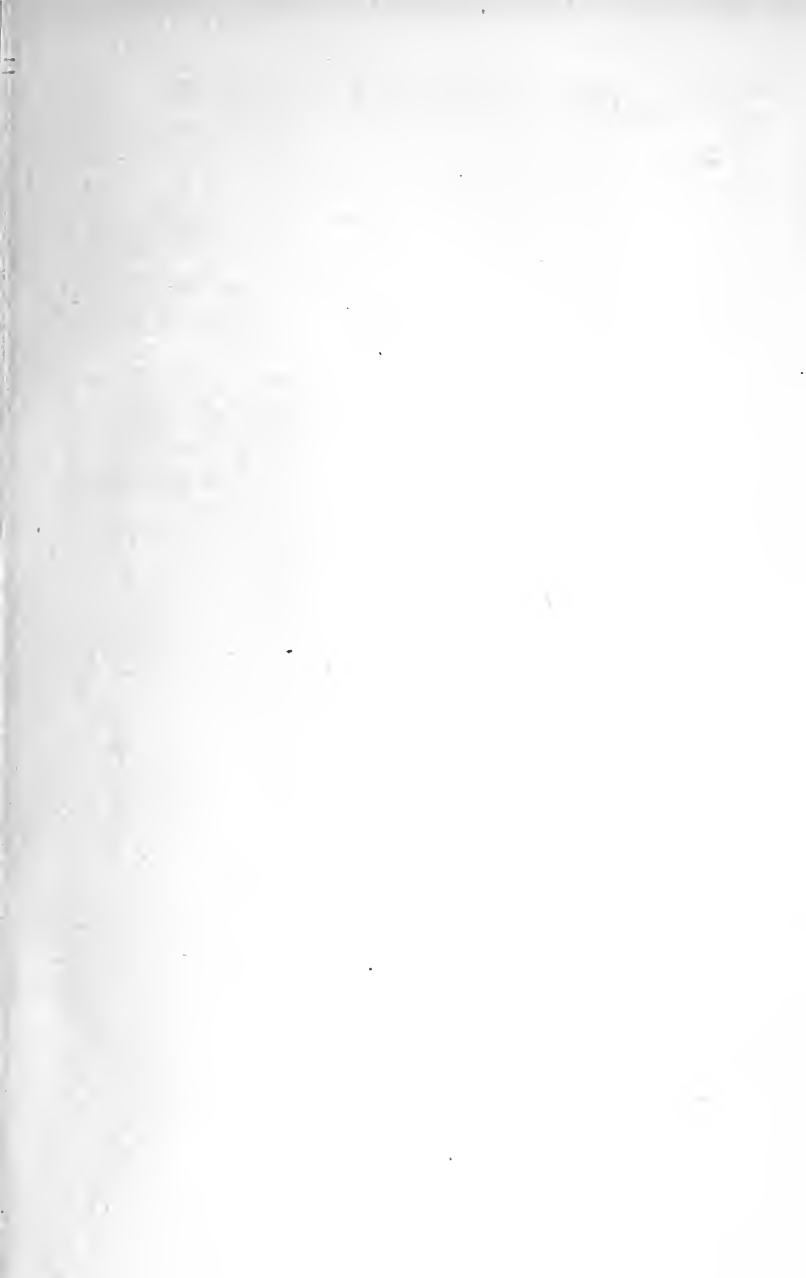
In a lonely cave on the road to Hsipaw in the Shan Hills, Tun Min now sees the years go by as he awaits a solution of the eternal puzzle: “What is Life, and Why are We?” His only sustenance is occasional, being an alms from some charitable wayfarer, but it is enough, and even in sad contrast with the spiritual food for which his soul hungers, and of which there is never enough. Sometimes the monotony of his life is broken by the intrusion of a panther or a leopard, or it may be a python, hunting his quarry, and furtively watching the latter’s movements; but asceticism has its own aroma, and the recluse finds a sanctuary where he might have found a sepulchre had he been of this world. Anchorites of all ages have exercised in some mysterious way by mere volition a supreme power over the lower animals, but Ko Tun Min and the Sayadaw, with their higher gifts and severer discipline, had discovered previously unsuspected properties of the mind, and to their comfort they could commune one with the other without the paraphernalia of modern Marconi-ism. This, however, was a short-lived pleasure, for the Bishop, heavy with years and piety, had died, and the mighty dynamo of

Tun Min's mind had failed to record an impression on the screens of the Great Unknown.

We leave him alone in his cave as a cold statue, with his eyes fixed on the waving forests, which they see not, and his soul centred on the eternal verities illumined by the pure light of Contentment and Peace.

On the riverside road at Pegu the tragedy of Minkalé and her lovers is still remembered, and when some wild catastrophe overtakes a proud and imperious parvenu, the familiar words, "It is the Repentance of Destiny," are heard and pondered.

THE END





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